

BAVINCKIAN RHAPSODY:  
HERMAN BAVINCK'S DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY

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## VITA

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CG	<i>Common Grace</i>
CW	<i>Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing</i> (Christian Worldview)
DOG	<i>The Doctrine of God</i>
GG	<i>Godsdienst en Godgeleerdheid</i> (Religion and Theology)
POR	<i>Philosophy of Revelation</i>
MO	<i>Modernisme en Orthodoxie</i> (Modernism and Orthodoxy)
ORF	<i>Our Reasonable Faith</i>
RD I	<i>Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena</i>
GD I	<i>Gerformeerde dogmatiek: Deel 1</i>
RD II	<i>Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation</i>
GD II	<i>Gerformeerde dogmatiek: Deel 2</i>
RD III	<i>Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ</i>
GD III	<i>Gerformeerde dogmatiek: Deel 3</i>
RD IV	<i>Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation</i>
GD IV	<i>Gerformeerde dogmatiek: Deel 4</i>
SOP	<i>The Sacrifice of Praise</i>

## ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to explore Herman Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity. No one has fully explored Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity before, those who have engaged it in past scholarship have pigeonholed it as strictly Thomistic. More recently Bavinck studies due to the "organic motif" has pushed against this Thomistic label being falsely thrust upon Bavinck like a shrunk, ill-fitting wool sweater. Rather they aver that Bavinck, while orthodox strives to be modern and moreover that he is too critical of the heart of Thomistic thinking to be considered purely Thomistic.

A key question the thesis poses is in what ways is Bavinck attempting to be modern in his doctrine of divine simplicity? Two tertiary questions that will inform this answer is how is Bavinck appropriating Thomas, but also eclectically appropriating other theologians in such a way that calling him Thomistic may miss the scope of his *DDS*? Is Bavinck doing anything unique in his articulation of divine simplicity that would make him difficult to categorize?

The answer to these questions centers on the growing implications birthed out of the identification of the organic motif as the central motif in Bavinck's thinking. This motif identifies the one Bavinck as eclectically orthodox and modern. The central aim of the thesis is to test the "organic" hypothesis in applying it to Bavinck's doctrine of divine simplicity.

## CHAPTER I:

### INTRODUCTION

In Herman Bavinck's inaugural address *Godsdienst en Godgeleerdheid (Religion and Theology)* at the Vrije Universiteit (Free University) of Amsterdam in 1902 he spoke about the intersection of religion and theology, specific for our interest he also articulated the task of the theologian. Bavinck reminds the listeners at once of both their creatureliness, and the exalted task of which theologians partake:

A theologian is and also remains a human being, just like any man of science, and as such he remains subject to the same conditions as any other person for his life and existence. He is not a person in general, removed from all reality, but he is a child of his time, a citizen of his state, an inhabitant of his country, and so too on the religious domain a member of a particular church and raised in a clearly defined confession.<sup>1</sup>

A theologian is someone who dedicates themselves to speaking about God, because they speak from and through Him. To practice theology — it is a holy work. It is a priestly service in the house of the Lord. It is itself religion, a serving of God in His temple, a devotion of heart and mind to the glory of His Name.<sup>2</sup>

These are placed at the front of the thesis, as a reminder both to the reader and writer of the holy creatureliness of theology; there exists an ontological gap between the Creator and the creature. Above all theology partakes in the mystery of faith; theology is bound by faith.<sup>3</sup> As we embark on this task of describing the simplicity of God we recognize the analogical tenor of theological language. We are creatures and even at maximum capacity we cannot wrap our minds around the Triune God. Therefore, we cannot know as he knows (univocally), nor has he kept the truth from us, in such a manner that we could never know anything (equivocally), instead because God is the Triune archetypal creator and redeemer, and has

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<sup>1</sup> GG, 60.

<sup>2</sup> GG, 62.

<sup>3</sup> GG, 67. "If need be, faith can do without theology but theology cannot for a moment exist without faith. This is not only its beginning; it is also its middle and its end. Above its doorway is written: God has hidden it from the wise and understanding and revealed them to children. In the end the most adept theologian returns from all his research to this confession."

revealed himself in both creation, the conscience, and through his Word we may know him analogically by thinking his thoughts after him in an ectypal manner.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps this is one of only a few ways to introduce a paper, which attempts to capture Bavinck as a theologian of his time – a man contextually, historically and confessionally bound. While also mimicking, inasmuch as possible the doxological task of unfolding the God who is simple, and offering in this thesis the glory due to God’s name. Therefore, this paper will partake in the humble mystery of faith, in which, “faith turns into wonder; knowledge terminates in adoration; and . . . confession becomes a song of praise and thanksgiving.”<sup>5</sup>

## **I. Who is Herman Bavinck?**

“I have kept the faith,” Herman Bavinck’s words from his deathbed ring for a true synopsis of his life.<sup>6</sup> Born into the home of a Dutch separatist preacher in 1854, Bavinck, along with his ten siblings, were shaped by the rhythms of a home steeped in the Word of God, and the three forms of unity that colored the secessionist churches. At an early age, Bavinck excelled in school eventually studying at the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (Christian Reformed Church) Theological School in Kampen. After a year there, he transferred to the

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<sup>4</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to defend this claim although it will be touched on in later chapters. *RD* 2:48. “The knowledge we have of God is altogether unique. This knowledge may be called positive insofar as by it we recognize a being infinite and distinct from all finite creatures. On the other hand, it is negative because we cannot ascribe a single predicate to God as we conceive that predicate in relation to creatures. It is therefore an *analogical* knowledge: a knowledge of a being who is unknowable in himself, yet able to make something of himself known in the being he created.” For a further elaboration on the analogical nature of theological language in Reformed Orthodoxy see Sebastian Rehnman, “The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy,” in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 353-401, 361. Steve Duby, “Contours of A Dogmatic Approach” *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2016), 55-90.

<sup>5</sup> *RD* I, 621.

<sup>6</sup> Ron Gleason, *Herman Bavinck: Pastor, Churchman, Statesman, and Theologian* (P&R Publishing: New Jersey, 2010), 424.



modernist school of Leiden Universiteit, while maintaining enrollment at Kampen.<sup>7</sup> From 1874-1880, Bavinck studied under the scientific model of professors and although he admired their approach he found himself in deep disagreement with them. To the relief of his church, Bavinck graduated having “kept the faith.”

Following the completion of his doctorate at Leiden, Bavinck entered the pastorate for a year before receiving a call to teach at Kampen, where he then taught from 1883 to 1901. There he wrote his magnum opus, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (*Reformed Dogmatics*). In 1902, Bavinck transitioned from Kampen to Amsterdam accepting Abraham Kuyper’s plea to teach theology at the Vrije Universiteit. While in Amsterdam, Bavinck was broadly engaged in politics, and at one point was the leader of the Kuyperian Anti-Revolutionary Party. In 1920, Bavinck suffered a heart attack while preaching. From that time onward Bavinck’s health suffered and he died in the hands of his loving wife, Johanna, in 1921.

This over-simplified biography of Bavinck’s life paints the picture of a theologian who loved God and had a deep longing for his country to be transformed by God. A cursory glance at Bavinck’s writings seemingly indicates that he lost interest in writing on theology later on in his life, although much of the revitalization in Bavinck studies has proved this to be untrue. He engaged the public on ethical issues of enfranchisement, family, war and wrote insightfully on psychology, pedagogy, and poetry. Bavinck’s biography is thus an unusual one, son of a conservative separatist preacher, schooled in the modernist theology of Leiden, the writer of the definitive dogmatic to come out of the Netherlands, who yet was active politically, ethically, and wrote on numerous issues seemingly

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<sup>7</sup> Thanks to a private conversation with Dr. James Eglinton I was informed that Bavinck stayed enrolled at both Leiden and Kampen, although he only attended Leiden during this time. He did however, sit in on ordination exams at both. Eglinton, “Herman Bavinck - The Preacher.” Lecture, International Presbyterian Church Presbytery, York, UK, September 20, 2016. In this lecture Eglinton suggests Bavinck had a multiplicity of reasons for attending the Leiden, namely he was seeking a more intellectually rigorous academic training, as well as the education offered at Leiden was substantially more socially advantageous.

disconnected from theology. This created fecund ground for the “two-Bavinck’s” hypothesis in which the enigmatic Bavinck was over-simplified into a Harvey Dent type theologian.<sup>8</sup> Those familiar with Batman will know Harvey Dent as the fictional supervillain Two Face who at one time was the charming and amiable district attorney. Dent’s life takes a turn when villain Sal “Boss” Maroni throws acid on his face and permanently alters both his physical and mental state. From this point on Dent becomes maniacally obsessed with duality, flipping a coin to make decisions.

In the “two Bavinck’s” hypothesis Bavinck is painted in a similar manner. In which the acid bath Bavinck experiences occurs at Leiden. John Bolt, put it aptly in his 2003 “state of the union” in Bavinck studies essay in which he wrote, “We must begin with reminding ourselves that any consideration of Herman Bavinck’s influence has to start with the annoying acknowledgement that there is not one but rather two Bavinck’s.”<sup>9</sup> To say this, is to suggest that Bavinck lived with a basic duality or between two poles. In this same article Bolt elucidates the poles as the “fundamentalist scholastic” Bavinck and “the progressive modern” Bavinck.<sup>10</sup> What resulted then was a “Wellhausian hermeneutic” in which readers of Bavinck could pick and chose which parts of Bavinck were orthodox, and which parts were modern.<sup>11</sup>

More recently, in Bavinck studies this hermeneutic has been overturned in favor of a single Bavinck, which to carry forth the illustration we may consider Bavinck, as asserting, “No, I’m Batman.” To put it this way is to affirm that Bavinck was not a figure split between orthodoxy and modernity, internally pitted against himself but rather there was one Bavinck

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Valentijn Hepp, *Dr Herman Bavinck* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1921), 317-18; Jan Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1968), 108-111.

<sup>9</sup> John Bolt, “Grand Rapids Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (2003): 263-280, 264-5.

<sup>10</sup> Bolt, “Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 265-266.

<sup>11</sup> Cory Brock, “Herman Bavinck and Neo-Thomism: Toward a Nuanced Rendering” (MTh Dissertation: University of Edinburgh, 2014), 5.

who critically appropriated diverse thinkers organically resourcing them for his own purpose within a confessional context. In 2008, Bavinck studies was resuscitated with such a vision of Bavinck. First, Brian Mattson's dissertation reevaluated Bavinck's nature and grace motif through Bavinck's trinitarian covenantal theology. Mattson persuasively argues that there was no such dualism in the mind of Bavinck. He wrote:

Bavinck saw no such dichotomy; and in that respect, there is only one Bavinck: the one who sought to articulate a scriptural theology in the context of, and with recourse of the categories of, Reformed orthodoxy. There is no "other" Bavinck to be found. One should not operate on the assumption that the tension he personally felt between his confessional commitments and his worldly fascination was, at the end of the day, an unresolved tension. Bavinck's life-long labors toward a unified worldview were not entirely futile and unrewarded.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, Mattson's found the two-Bavinck's hypothesis wanting. In its place Mattson suggested a single Bavinck and to conceptualize Bavinck's thinking within his own organic covenant theology. Furthermore, he argued Bavinck redefines the organic motif with resources "internal" to the Reformed faith and wielded it to speak into the 19th centuries "philosophical preoccupation with teleological concepts."<sup>13</sup> In 2010, James Eglinton's dissertation provided the final catalyst to overturn the two-Bavinck's hypothesis.<sup>14</sup> Eglinton, in line with Mattson, convincingly proposed a new reading of Bavinck's "organic motif" as the motif that unites Bavinck, "in which the archetypal unity of the Godhead brings a sense of coherence to all other reality."<sup>15</sup> This motif allows Bavinck to conceptualize a worldview where unity does not imply uniformity, diversity resists chaos, and the world is an ectypal

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<sup>12</sup> Brian Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics*, Studies in Reformed Theology Vol. 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 54.

<sup>14</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif*. (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012). Eglinton has recently expanded on this thesis, in a recent book, the introduction fittingly establishes Bavinck within his historic context enabling the reader to perceive Bavinck as one successfully striving to be at once orthodox and modern. *Herman Bavinck on Preaching and Preachers*, ed. & trans., James Eglinton (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 29.

unity-in-diversity. Bavinck utilizes the motif to “facilitate, rather than to remove the tension between distinct elements in a system.”<sup>16</sup>

This challenge to the hermeneutic underlying much of Bavinck studies called for a reconsideration of many traditional interpretations of Bavinck. For example, that of Bavinck as a Neo-Thomist. Recently, scholars have pushed against this Thomistic label being thrust upon Bavinck.<sup>17</sup> Rather they aver that through his organic motif he endeavors to incorporate ancient and modern thinkers alike in an eclectic and organic manner striving for a contextual and confessionally faithful Reformed orthodoxy.<sup>18</sup> This theological polemic that Bavinck employs then positions him as too critical of the heart of Thomistic thinking to be considered purely Thomistic and rather Bavinck’s theological constructions should be seen as wholly unique to Bavinck. The importance of the organic motif cannot be underplayed and will be given a thorough investigation in the following chapter.

## II. The Structure of ‘Bavinckian Rhapsody’

This thesis then builds upon the growing implications birthed out of the identification of the organic motif as the central motif in Bavinck’s thinking, which identifies the one Bavinck as eclectically orthodox and modern. The central aim of the thesis is to test the organic motif hypothesis in applying it to Bavinck’s doctrine of divine simplicity (hereafter *DDS*). It strives to answer the following questions: In what ways is Bavinck attempting to be simultaneously modern and orthodox in his *DDS*? A tertiary question that will inform this answer is how is Bavinck appropriating Thomas, but also eclectically appropriating other theologians in such

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<sup>16</sup> Eglinton, “Bavinck’s Organic Motif: Questions Seeking Answers,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no. 1 (April 2010): 51-71, 67.

<sup>17</sup> See Greg Parker Jr., “Reformation or Revolution? Herman Bavinck and Henri De Lubac on Nature and Grace,” *Perichoresis* 15 no. 3 (2017) 81-95; Brock, “Herman Bavinck and Neo-Thomism”; Mattson, “A Soft Spot for Paganism? Herman Bavinck and ‘Insider’ Movements” *The Bavinck Review* 4 (2013): 32-43.

<sup>18</sup> Cory Brock and Nathaniel Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Eclecticism: On Catholicity, Consciousness, and Theological Epistemology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 70, no. 3 (August 2017): 310-332.

a way that calling him Thomistic misses the nuances of his *DDS*? The thesis can be seen as being broken into two phase.

The first prepares the reader to see Bavinck as at once orthodox and modern, not in a dualistic manner, but as the one Bavinck.<sup>19</sup> An exposition of the various hermeneutics that have dominated Bavinck studies introduces us in chapter 2 to the organic motif and his organic hermeneutic. Therefore the second chapter establishes the hermeneutic through which Bavinck's *DDS* will be interpreted.

In chapter three, Bavinck's theological method is explored. The aim of this chapter is to examine how Bavinck's method differentiates him from Aquinas and thus substantiate for us the claim that Bavinck cannot be considered solely Thomistic. This is to be exposed against the backdrop of Thomas Aquinas *DDS*. For it has been assumed that Bavinck's *DDS* is little more than a Reformed xerox of Aquinas. This chapter, therefore situates Bavinck as having a different method than Aquinas and begins to enable us to realize that while Bavinck may utilize language that is akin to Thomas he is appropriating the terminology for his own purpose. This will cause us to ask the necessary question, then if Bavinck is not strictly Thomistic how does one describe his *DDS*?

Part I, then introduces readers to Bavinck's organic motif and his ecletically principled Reformed catholic hermeneutic. In addition, it identifies a point of contention between Aquinas and Bavinck in their view of theology and theological method. This point of discontinuity adds support to the suggestion that Bavinck should be understood on his own terms and not be identified purely with his sources. Part I concludes offering the

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<sup>19</sup> *MO*, 78, 102-103. Cory Brock, "Orthodox yet Modern: Herman Bavinck's Appropriation of Schleiermacher" (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2018), 4, 8-9. Bavinck defines "orthodox" as "the holding high of the confession" which he qualifies to be restricted to a particular Christian tradition and that adherence to the confession is not the "end game" of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy and modernity are not polar opposites for Bavinck. The dogmatic task for him rather than avoiding modernism requires one to conjoin oneself "to the life of the times in which one labors."

question, if Bavinck should not be considered Thomistic, how should interpreters of Bavinck then speak of his DDS? This we turn to answer in Part II.

Part II transitions to a close reading of Bavinck's *DDS*. Chapter four begins with a direct exposition of Bavinck's 1907 *DDS*. Here his engagement with eclectic scholars stretching across the ancient, medieval, and modern era is surveyed and his organic hermeneutic is displayed as appropriating a diverse group of thinkers for the purpose of constructing his own *DDS*. Here Bavinck's organic road is laid out for us to see as he engages different thinkers both critically and appreciatively. One example will be that of the Absolute. It is clear that Bavinck is eclectically engaging modern philosophers and theologians in a way that does not entail systematic endorsement, but rather allows Bavinck to strive for Reformed orthodoxy while resourcing what is beneficial of the modern terminology of Absolute. Bavinck's principled and critical engagement of modernity in his doctrine of God will require a nuanced reading of his *DDS*.

In Chapter five, the structure of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* is explored along with an examination of the structure of his doctrine of God. After observing Bavinck's structure we will turn directly to a survey of the various sections of his doctrine of God to understand the role that divine simplicity plays for him, namely the divine names, incommunicable attributes, and communicable attributes. The chapter will close drawing out points of continuity and discontinuity with Aquinas and the Reformed scholastics. By drawing out the continuities and discontinuities we will see that one must read Bavinck as performing his own unique theological task. His *DDS* should therefore be read on his own terms.

In closing this chapter, we must ask the question of why Bavinck's DDS? There is one primary reason that makes Bavinck's *DDS* a prime test case for the organic motif. That is because the organic motif relies on an archetypal/ectypal understanding of God as unity-

in-diversity. The *DDS* is the superlative doctrine that demonstrates the unity of God's essence while also holding in tension the diversity of his attributes. Therefore, understanding how Bavinck articulates this doctrine will shed light on the organic motif.

The aim of the work is not to vindicate the *DDS*, nor to answer any critiques of *DDS*, but primarily to exposit Bavinck's *DDS* in light of the development of the organic hermeneutic. In doing so three conclusions are advanced: 1) To consider Bavinck's *DDS* to be strictly Thomist is inaccurate and his engagement with Thomas requires more nuance, 2) his polemical engagement with diverse thinkers reveals how Bavinck can be at once confessionally Reformed while also engaging and appropriating modern thinkers, which continues to advance the organic hermeneutic, and 3) that Bavinck's *DDS* should be viewed as an example of his eclectic Reformed catholicity in that he appropriates both ancient and modern thinkers in a unique and substantial way. For these reasons, the assertion that Bavinck's *DDS* is Thomist should be shed for a more nuanced, eclectic and distinct rendering and the organic motif of Eglinton should be seen as upheld.

In conclusion, then the paper will put forth that Bavinck's *DDS* is "Thomistic" in as much as it has similarities with Thomas construction, however, Bavinck does not strictly appropriate Thomas, but rather he resources ancient, reformed, and modern thinkers alike in his *DDS*. Thus the suggestion is that Bavinck's organic hermeneutic should be considered akin to a rhapsody, in which the composer is able to pull together contrasting styles, tones, and moods into a free-flowing integrated piece that distinctly bears the mark of the composer. Bavinck's divine simplicity takes part in the rhapsody that is his doctrine of God. This is to suggest Bavinck was highly intentional about every aspect of his doctrine of God, and recommends reading Bavinck's simplicity as eclectic, resourceful, modern, and unique to the composer while also being confessional, orthodox, and classical.

**PART I**  
**ORTHODOX AND MODERN**



## CHAPTER II:

### BAVINCK AND HIS INTERPRETERS

#### I. Bavinck from Harvey Dent to Batman

In 2003, when John Bolt admitted his irritation at the “two-Bavincks” hypothesis he could not have known that Bavinck studies would look drastically different just a decade later. The dark nights of drawing out the supposed duality in Bavinck’s thinking – the good conservative Harvey Dent and the questionable Two-face have come to a cosmic halt. This chapter, will move beyond the “Two-Bavinck’s” hermeneutic that dominated Bavinck studies through discussing the organic advancements in Bavinck scholarship. This will establish for us the trajectory of Bavinck studies and provide fertile ground for an engagement with Bavinck’s *DDS*, while also providing a methodology for us to follow.

To his credit Bolt hinted that the duality that many found in Bavinck was absent from Bavinck’s tour de force. “The *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* is the serious and, I judge, largely successful effort by a modern, scientific theologian to be, at one and the same time, a faithful, churchly dogmatician.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, included in in each volume of the *Reformed Dogmatics* in Bolt’s editorial introduction is this laudable evaluation: “Bavinck takes modern philosophy (Kant, Schelling, Hegel), Darwin, and the claims of geological and biological science seriously but never uncritically. His willingness as a theologian to engage modern thought and science seriously is a hallmark of his exemplary work.”<sup>21</sup> In germane form we thus possessed Bavinck’s disposition towards diverse thinkers and the “Bat signal” for the organic motif. Rather than positing two conflicting poles in Bavinck the organic motif was

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<sup>20</sup> Bolt, “Between Kampen and Amsterdam,” 269.

<sup>21</sup> *RD* I, 14.

unveiled as the conceptual tool that Bavinck utilized to navigate ideological tensions and deploy various thinkers in an eclectic and principled manner.<sup>22</sup>

So, what exactly is the organic motif? The organic motif in Bavinck was originally believed to belong to a German idealist influence, and moreover a broader historic use of the word introduced by Jan Veenhof's 1968 dissertation.<sup>23</sup> Veenhof cast Bavinck as an Enlightenment theologian. In *Trinity and Organism* Eglinton reasons Bavinck's utilization of the organic motif grew out of his Reformed heritage in which he specifically wields the terminology to counter Post-enlightenment mechanism.<sup>24</sup> He unveils that Bavinck defines the organic motif in *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (*The Christian Worldview*), a rarely studied and untranslated work of his.<sup>25</sup>

In his *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* Bavinck gives four distinctives to the organic motif. First, it recognizes the unity and diversity of creation.<sup>26</sup> This proceeds out of God's Triune character. If God is Triune, for Bavinck the universe must be revelatory of his unity, as well as his diversity. "It must reflect his identity as three-in-one."<sup>27</sup> If God is Trinity, the universe must reveal God in interconnected unities-in-diversities. The second signpost is that "unity precedes diversity."<sup>28</sup> The unfolding of the organic motif relies on the balance between unity and diversity. As Bavinck states, "There is the most profuse diversity and yet,

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<sup>22</sup> Eglinton, "Bavinck's Organic Motif," 67.

<sup>23</sup> Veenhof, *Revelatie en Inspiratie*, 346-65.

<sup>24</sup> Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 54.

<sup>25</sup> James Eglinton, Nathaniel Sutanto, and Cory Brock will be publishing a translation and lengthy editorial introduction with Crossway in 2019 of *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing*.

<sup>26</sup> Eglinton, "Bavinck's Organic Motif," 62.

<sup>27</sup> *CW*, 50 "erkent zij zowel de eenheid als de verscheidenheid in het geschapene." Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 67. "The created order is marked by simultaneous unity and diversity." The world 'must' be revelatory of God in this manner for Bavinck if the world is to bear a truthful witness to God as Triune.

<sup>28</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 67; *CW*, 51. "Leert zij, dat het geheel aan de delen, de eenheid aan de veelheid voorafgaat."

in that diversity, there is also a superlative kind of unity.”<sup>29</sup> It is a unity that makes way for diversity.

The third aspect of the organic motif is that all parts of the organism’s “shared life is orchestrated by a common idea.”<sup>30</sup> The world as a whole is connected and intertwined organically interplaying in mutually beneficial relationships. Bavinck desires to combat “the idea that ‘unity in diversity’ is disorderly.”<sup>31</sup> But rather we are to understand the world as “perfectly keyed string music, whose harmonies interpret for us the glory and blessedness of the divine life.”<sup>32</sup> There is a healthy complexity and multiplicity in the world, but it is ultimately in synchrony as each complement the other. The grand rhapsody of God’s creation.

The final contour of the organic motif is that it finds wholeness in its “teleological definiteness.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the organism is united in its *telos*. Humanity, as an organism, is an example of this: “Humanity has its ultimate purpose, along with all other creatures, in the glorification of God. To that end all things are subordinate. To that end all things, even sin and suffering, work together. And with a view to this end, the world is functionally well organized.”<sup>34</sup> Nothing exists in creation that is not pointing ultimately to the glory of God. As Bavinck divulges, “The organism in all its unity and diversity, has been made for the glory of the Triune God.”<sup>35</sup>

The organic motif, is therefore distinctly Trinitarian in shape to display and reflect the unity-in-diversity of God as God reveals himself to man in the created order. As noted by Eglinton, Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* on a large scale carries out this organic and highly

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<sup>29</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 68.

<sup>30</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 68.

<sup>31</sup> Eglinton, “Bavinck’s Organic Motif,” 64.

<sup>32</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 69.

<sup>33</sup> RD II, 436 (Emphasis mine).

<sup>34</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> RD I, 438.

Trinitarian hermeneutic.<sup>36</sup> Bavinck's prolegomena introduces us to his organic method in which he recognizes knowledge as being composed of unity-in-diversity with theology being the servant queen who unites, precedes, and brings teleological purpose to the disparate fields of knowledge.<sup>37</sup> This accounts for the organic multiplicity inherent in the human experience while providing the coherency that the human experience not only desires, but requires for intelligibility. "God's revelation constitutes an organic unity such that its assimilation into human knowledge will form a single organism of scientific knowledge in which knowledge of the whole precedes the parts, with theology as the unifier of the diverse fields of inquiry."<sup>38</sup> Bavinck therefore, uses organic phrases to convey the unity-in-diversity throughout the created order in which all of creation reflects God's self-disclosure of himself.

In summary, Eglinton argues that Bavinck is not split between orthodoxy and modernity, but rather utilizing the organic motif he seeks to understand reality as a reflection of the unity-in-diversity of the Trinity. Mattson and Eglinton's projects substantially re-oriented Bavinck studies and opened the door for continued questioning of paradigms that have long prevailed in the field. Eglinton suggests:

In probing the consequences of a reunited view of Bavinck's thought to this one particular area, that of the organic, one has also only made the first steps in a wider movement in Bavinck studies. If it is only appropriate to speak of a single Herman Bavinck, it is not simply the organic motif that must be reappropriated. Rather, the

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<sup>36</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 89-90.

<sup>37</sup> CG, 65. In his work *De Gemeene Genade* he comments that theology is afforded a special place because it is the science that is united by both special and common grace. This in turn allows theology to "accord to the other sciences their full due." Theology serves the other sciences, uniting the sciences and bringing a teleological purpose to all sciences for "she prophesies a glorious future in which all oppositions, including those between nature and grace, shall be reconciled, and all things, whether on earth or in heaven, shall again in Christ be one." It is worth mentioning, Bavinck begins to use organic language in *De Gemeene Genade* at the end when writing about the disparate spheres of human life, which find their cohesion in grace.

<sup>38</sup> Nathaniel Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck on the Image of God and Original Sin," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18:2 (2016): 174-190, 177.

break down of the “two Bavinck’s” model calls for nothing less than a paradigm shift in Bavinck studies.<sup>39</sup>

It is interesting to note for our purposes the thesis Eglinton explored in his chapter “The Organic Motif and Doctrine of God.” That the “Trinity *ad intra* leads to organism *ad extra*.”<sup>40</sup> There exists here for Bavinck a Creator-creature distinction; the Triune God is being, creation is becoming. Bavinck while using the organic motif to describe the created order does not wield it to describe God; he consistently utilizes organic terminology when speaking of the cosmos but, when focusing directly on God he refrains from organic language. In other words, “one finds that he evokes the organic motif to explain the sense in which the archetypal (Trinitarian) unity of the godhead acts as the foundation for all consequent (triniform) unity in the creation. The motif is thus viewed as an agent of conceptual unity, one grounded in Trinitarian foundations and moving towards a triniform goal.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, in our focus on divine simplicity the organic motif will be linguistically absent, nonetheless the foundation of Bavinck’s organic hermeneutic, the Triune God, is present. This organic hermeneutic pervades Bavinck’s use of theological sources. This we may call his Reformed catholicity as others have.<sup>42</sup>

## II. Bavinck’s ‘organic’ Reformed catholicity

Two scholars who have identified this Reformed catholicity are Cory Brock and Nathaniel Sutanto. In their 2017 article “Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Eclecticism: On catholicity, consciousness, and theological epistemology” they argue for Bavinck as one who eclectically

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<sup>39</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 209.

<sup>40</sup> Eglinton, “Bavinck’s Organic Motif,” 64.

<sup>41</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Brock and Sutanto, “Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Eclecticism: On Catholicity, Consciousness, and Theological Epistemology.”; Brock and Sutanto, “A Microcosm of the Kingdom: Bavinck on Inner Catholicity,” *The Greystone Review* (Forthcoming 2018). I am grateful for private conversations with Brock and Sutanto, including a presentations at the 2016 American Academy of Religion by Sutanto and presentations at the 2016 Kuyper Conference by both Sutanto and Brock, and 2017 Kuyper Conference by Sutanto.

appropriates diverse thinkers as they suits his Reformed theological needs.<sup>43</sup> They defined Bavinck's "Reformed catholicity" as follows:

... for Bavinck, to be Reformed and catholic, principled and eclectic, is not merely to acknowledge the diversity within the confessional boundaries of seventeenth-century Protestant scholastics or traditional Reformed orthodoxy. Rather, to be Reformed and catholic is to develop a stance in which the fruits of thinking from Aristotle to Kant, from Augustine to Schleiermacher and from Thomas to Hegel, are together considered valuable. To be sure, Bavinck disagrees with some of these thinkers, but he navigates them in a reciprocal fashion where the thought of one may inform another's.<sup>44</sup>

They perceive Bavinck as performing his organic theological task enroute to his goal of reformed catholicity. The task of theology itself is not one of repristination but re-appropriation. Bavinck does this through first, engaging scripture and history. In this way, Bavinck does not universally receive any theologian, but rather proceeds from scripture to the Reformed tradition and then for the sake of continued reformation through the rest of the ancients and moderns. The second task, is to make distinctions through polemic engagement in which unity-in-diversity is sought.

The third and final task, is for the theologian to seek to affirm truth no matter where it is found. Bavinck therefore engages moderns and ancient thinkers alike looking to appropriate them through scripture and the Reformed confessions, but he continues to develop these through the questions and insights of modern thought both inside and outside of theology. Bavinck's catholicity is illuminated against the backdrop of his view of theology among the sciences.

In Bavinck's day due to the Higher Education Act (1876), theology in the universities was beginning to be sourced out by religious studies departments. In this manner, disciplines

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<sup>43</sup> Brock and Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism," 310-332.

<sup>44</sup> Brock and Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism," 313, 317. "The term 'reformed' is, for Bavinck, a catholic nuance. Its scope is limited in relation to the weight of the word 'catholic'. The concept 'reformed' is a reference to the manner in which catholicity performs, a recognition that one works from a tradition outwards. He believes the Reformed tradition to contain the most relatively pure reflections on theology ever produced."

that were considered neutral such as church history and biblical exegesis were taught by religious studies departments, while dogmatics and practical theology was restricted to confessional institutions. When this legislation passed Bavinck had just entered the University of Leiden and was studying under modernist theologians.<sup>45</sup> Experiencing this struggle brought Bavinck a distinct perspective and an insistence on theology as a discipline in the university; furthermore he sought for coherence amongst the disciplines. Bavinck's critique of the program lacking unity is telling; it reveals that Bavinck himself was seeking to unify all the disparate fields of knowledge. He does this specifically in theology, which he first had to establish as a science.<sup>46</sup>

Bavinck makes two moves to position theology as a viable science. First, he positions revelation as a source of knowledge of God and therefore man is able to learn about and know God by faith. "Precisely because a true faith-knowledge of God exists, dogmatics has the knowledge of God as part of its content and can rightly claim to be a science."<sup>47</sup> Second, he locates theology as a positive science.<sup>48</sup> The dogmatician has the strict task "to think God's thoughts after him and trace their unity."<sup>49</sup> These two features combined in allowing theology to maintain a unique object, and recognize theology's distinct methodology. At the same time, "Theology . . . is absolutely not alone in the world of sciences. Like every other department discipline, theology too has its own object and principle, method and aim. At the

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<sup>45</sup> Herman Bavinck, "Theology and Religious Studies," *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, ed. John Bolt, trans. Harry Bonstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 53. As Bavinck confesses of his time at Leiden and the existence of religion and theology departments, "The result was a strange mixture of incompatibles lacking all integration and unity of conception. Some of the subjects taught remind one of the old theology programs others clearly belong to the field of religious studies."

<sup>46</sup> Bavinck defines science broadly as a field of knowledge.

<sup>47</sup> *RD* I, 43.

<sup>48</sup> This is not to suggest that Bavinck is a positivist, but rather his theology is governed by a specific object (God).

<sup>49</sup> *RD* I, 44.

same time, theology also possesses a range of characteristics in common with the other sciences.”<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, Bavinck insists:

Science exists also for God’s sake and finds its final goal in his glory. Specifically, this then is true of theology; in a special sense, it is from God and by God, and hence for God as well. But precisely because its final purpose does not lie in any creature, not in practice, or in piety, or in the church, amidst all the [other] sciences it maintains its own character and nature.<sup>51</sup>

Leading him to his conclusion that not only does theology belong in the university as a distinct field of knowledge, but it belongs in “the place of honor” in “virtue of the object it pursues; it is and remains . . . the queen of the sciences.”<sup>52</sup> Theology is the servant queen providing unity to all the disparate sciences. Bavinck’s organic considerations shine through as Bavinck seeks synthesis in the sciences through theology.

Thus as Sutanto indicates theology plays “a foundational role with regard to the other sciences, providing the unity and telos that harmoniously grounds the diverse fields of knowledge.”<sup>53</sup> This accounts for the organic multiplicity inherent in the human experience while providing the coherency that the human experience not only desires, but also requires for intelligibility. Therefore for Bavinck, “God’s revelation (special and general) constitutes an organic unity such that its assimilation into human knowledge will form a single organism of scientific knowledge in which knowledge of the whole precedes the parts, with theology as the unifier of the diverse fields of inquiry.”<sup>54</sup> This has implications on Bavinck’s display of catholicity.

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<sup>50</sup> *RD I*, 43.

<sup>51</sup> *RD I*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> *RD I*, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Sutanto, “Organic Knowing: The Theological Epistemology of Herman Bavinck” (PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2018), 69, 81. “There are at least two reasons that ground Bavinck’s belief that theology is the queen of the sciences. (1) Theology is the queen of by virtue of the direct objects of its study – God himself, and (2) theology is the queen because all of the sciences themselves are theological.

<sup>54</sup> Sutanto. “Herman Bavinck on the Image of God and Original Sin,” 177.



The organic interconnectedness of all knowledge requires Bavinck to consider beyond the material object of scripture to tradition and modern thinkers alike who may shed light on theology. Cory Brock and Nathaniel Sutanto helpfully identify this as part of Bavinck's three-fold reformed-catholicity in which the third principle is to "search for what is true and valid no matter where it is found."<sup>55</sup> Thus for Bavinck theology has a wholly organic character. It must be done under the conditions of one's own time, being subject to the material norm of scripture, while necessarily taking place within the church, but also considering all other fields of knowledge and thus participating in the organic interconnectedness of knowledge both historically and experientially. Theology then functions among the sciences as the field of knowledge that provides unity, purpose, and coherence to knowledge while also having its own unique object and method.

This Reformed catholicity in other words, considers the organic interconnectedness of all knowledge and seeks to appropriate truth where truth is found, while submitting oneself to the material norm of scripture, and the ecclesial nature of theology. It is this lens through which we will seek to understand Bavinck's *DDS*.

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<sup>55</sup> Brock and Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism," 317.

### CHAPTER III: MAPPING BAVINCK'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD IN *DDS*

The aim of this chapter is to map the theological method of Herman Bavinck in formulating his *DDS*. This is to be exposed against the backdrop of Thomas Aquinas' method in approaching the *DDS*. As stated earlier in the thesis, recent attention has identified that Bavinck's thought, apart from Neo-Calvinism, cannot be easily categorized by any 'ism' including that of 'Thomism.'<sup>56</sup> This chapter looks to add to the argument by examining the theological method of Bavinck, and then exposing it in the construction of his *DDS*.

This chapter will proceed forward in three waves. First, building upon previous chapters we will show Bavinck's principled yet eclectic theological method, which will be displayed in his *DDS*. In the second half of the chapter we will follow the same path with Aquinas beginning with his vision of the role of theology among the sciences, which will introduce discontinuity between him and Bavinck. This will transition into understanding of his method, which will be exhibited in his *DDS*. The third wave of the paper will draw out the continuities and discontinuities between Aquinas and Bavinck in their theological method, specifically as it relates to their *DDS*. The result of the chapter, will aid us in the recognition that we cannot simply identify Bavinck with any 'ism.' Rather than seeing Bavinck as a reformed copy of Aquinas' *DDS* we will recognize the self-consciously eclectic character of Bavinck's method, theology, and use of sources as one that differentiates him from Aquinas. This will allow us to continue into the next chapter expositing Bavinck on his own terms.

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<sup>56</sup> Sutanto and Brock, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism," 310-332.

A growing number of Anglophone scholars have evaluated the theological prolegomena of Herman Bavinck.<sup>57</sup> Most who touched upon it wrote on it prior to the identification of his organic hermeneutic.<sup>58</sup> As mentioned earlier, the organic hermeneutic is the archetypal/ectypal theological program found throughout Bavinck's writings in which the Triune God is the archetypal unity-in-diversity. The Triune God created and preserves the cosmos to reflect him in ectypal unities-in-diversities. The created order therefore is an "interconnected web of vestigia trinitatis" made to display the unity-in-diversity of the Trinity.<sup>59</sup> In particular, all of creation is organically linked in a manner that one cannot consider the whole without considering the parts, much like one cannot consider the person of Christ without considering his shared essence with the Father, and the Spirit.<sup>60</sup>

The engagement with his prolegomena has focused primarily on Bavinck's epistemology, rather than his theological methodology.<sup>61</sup> Nathaniel Sutanto has written with

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<sup>57</sup> Gerry Beshears, "Continuity and Change in the Theological Methods of Herman Bavinck and G.C. Berkouwer." Lecture, Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, December 1984. 1-82, 5-11. Beshears locates the 'organic' hermeneutic, that all knowledge is organic, that the whole precedes the parts, the common idea, unity and diversity, but his lecture though on 'Bavinck's method' presents a discussion on general, and special revelation rather than theological method; Matthew Roberts, "Thinking like a Christian: The Prolegomena of Herman Bavinck" *Ecclesia Reformanda* 1, no. 1 (2009): 70-91.; Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck on Perception and Knowing God" *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1(2018): 115-134, 131. Sutanto argues persuasively for a more nuanced reading of Bavinck's "realism" as 'Reformed-organic-realism' or 'organic epistemology'."

<sup>58</sup> Those who have noted Bavinck's method post the recognition of the organic motif include: Brock and Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck's Reformed Eclecticism,"; Bruce Pass, "The Question of the Central Dogma in Herman Bavinck," *Calvin Theological Journal* (Forthcoming 2018).

<sup>59</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 81.

<sup>60</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 89. We must keep in mind, that the God is unlike anything else. He is not 'organic' as his creation is. This is captured in Eglinton's turn of phrase: "The Trinity is wholly unlike anything else, but everything else is like the Trinity."

<sup>61</sup> Hank van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth, and Trust. Studies in Reformed Theology* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2008); Scott K. Oliphint, "Bavinck's Realism, the Logos Principle, and *Sola Scriptura*." *Westminster Theological Journal* 72 (2010): 359-390.; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Herman Bavinck - Proto Reformed Epistemologist." *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010): 133-146.; David Sytsma "Herman Bavinck's Thomistic Epistemology: the Argument and sources of his Principia of Science" in *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology*, ed. John Bolt (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 2011); Michael Chen, "Herman Bavinck and Augustine on Epistemology." *Bavinck Review* 2 (2011): 96-106.; Steve Duby, "Working with the Grain of Nature: Epistemic Underpinnings for Christian Witness in the Theology of Herman Bavinck." *Bavinck Review* 3 (2012): 60-84.; Bruce Pass, "Herman Bavinck and the Problem of New Wine in Old Wineskins." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17 no. 4 (2015): 432-449; Arvin Vos, "Knowledge according to Bavinck and Aquinas." *Bavinck Review* 5 (2015): 9-36; Greg Parker. "Bavinck's Organic Epistemology: The

persuasive clarity recently on Bavinck's epistemology and a distillation of his work will aid us as we strive to look beyond his epistemology to his dogmatic method. Sutanto's contribution, building off of the foundation of Eglinton and Mattson, has hoisted Bavinck out of the Thomistic and Kantian haze scholarship has placed him in. In his dissertation "Organic Knowing" he posits Bavinck's epistemology should be considered an "organic epistemology" by this he means that it is rooted in the Triune God as the human mind organically participates in creation. Bavinck utilizes this organic hermeneutic to traverse Kant's subject-object dichotomy. How does this work? Sutanto argues the correspondence occurs between the content of our consciousness and the object of our knowledge because of three features of Bavinck's epistemology: (1) the organic ontology of creation, in which the created order is organically linked which allows for correspondence between the whole and the parts.<sup>62</sup> (2) The eternal divine counsel weaves an organic web in which all dimensions are connected.<sup>63</sup> There is therefore, a presupposition of correspondence between subject and object. (3) The ongoing revelatory activity of the 2nd person of the Trinity sustains this organic connection.<sup>64</sup> This has implications for how Bavinck understands what it means to do theology.

## I. Theology, Method, Bavinck's *DDS*

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Trinitarian epistemology of Herman Bavinck in light of the Organic Motif." Lecture. North-East Regional Evangelical Theology Society, South Hamilton, MA March 2016; Nathaniel Sutanto, "Retrieval and Re-Interpretation: Herman Bavinck's Eclectic Catholicity and the Organic Motif in His Theological Epistemology." American Academy of Religion, San Antonio, TX November 2016; Nathaniel Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck on Perception and Knowing God," *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no. 1(2018): 115-134.

Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," Sutanto engages in his dissertation both Bavinck's method and epistemology. He has paid the most attention to Bavinck's theological methodology next to his theological teammate Cory Brock.

<sup>62</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 21, 191. See also Nathaniel Sutanto, "Herman Bavinck and Thomas Reid on Perception and Knowing God" *Harvard Theological Review* 111, no.1 (2018): 115-134, 128-129.

<sup>63</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 193-194. Sutanto, "Bavinck and Thomas Reid," 128-131.

<sup>64</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 194-195, 215-224.

In light of Bavinck's "organic epistemology" all sciences share certain methodological considerations because of their interconnectedness.<sup>65</sup> However, each science will have distinct methodologies of its own. Nonetheless, these distinct sciences do not work alone, but rather in conjunction with the other sciences as a unified whole, expressing the diversity and unity of knowledge with theology being the foundational discipline. We see this in Bavinck's lecture "The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System."<sup>66</sup> Before considering the main thrust of his lecture the benefits and fallbacks (spoiler: for Bavinck there are no cons) of a theological system, he first considers what it even means to speak of a system. This he roots in the systematic organic essence of all things:

After all, everything that exists is systematic. The entire cosmos was created and arranged according to a fixed plan. It is not aggregate of materials and forces that were accidentally merged. If it were, it would not constitute a cosmos, a unity. But all things are oriented toward each other, exist together in an unbreakable connection, together constitute a system, an organism.<sup>67</sup>

This is precisely what is outlined above 'the organic interconnectedness' of all knowledge. This organic connectedness is an ectypal reflection of the Triune God's unity-in-diversity. Thus in the act of discerning God's organic revelation, general and special, man is on scientific task of tracing all things back to God. "All science is the rendering of the thoughts (of God) laid down by God in his works."<sup>68</sup> As Bavinck proceeds in "Pros and Cons" he turns his attention to Dogmatics. Bavinck gives three rhapsodaic organic considerations for us to consider in the task of theology: (1) Dogmatics is always ecclesial and therefore confessional, (2) dogmatics requires a two-fold principium of scripture and tradition (3)

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<sup>65</sup> Sutanto, "Bavinck and Thomas Reid," 131.

<sup>66</sup> Bavinck, "The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System," trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman *The Bavinck Review* 5, (2014): 90-103. As introduced in chapter two, Bavinck views theology as the 'queen of the sciences' that which field of knowledge which plays the fundamental role with regard to the other sciences, as the catalyst for unity and coherence among the disparate disciplines and facilitating teleological purpose. Bavinck's organic considerations shine through as Bavinck seeks synthesis in the sciences through theology.

<sup>67</sup> Bavinck, "The Pros and Cons," 90.

<sup>68</sup> Bavinck, *Christelijke Wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), 58.

dogmatics must be contextual. These three principles at a surface level reflect the organic ideals of Bavinck, in considering the whole and the parts and the interconnectedness of all of life and knowledge.

The first methodological necessity is to recognize that the task of dogmatics is ecclesial and therefore confessional. By this Bavinck want us to recognize that theology is not “a private opinion or individual sentiment”, nor strictly “biblical” for this would result in a system that most likely has “anti-ecclesiastical impulses... and... compel(s) all ecclesiastical differences to the same level, committing an offense against its own existence and history.”<sup>69</sup> Rather theology, is the “faith truth declared and confessed” by the “whole church or by one of its branches.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore theology is not the task of an individual, but rather an authorized church teaching in which the whole community of saints participates.

This moves us to the second methodological principle of dogmatics two-fold fount of the Holy Spirit. Dogmatics must pay continual attention to Holy Scripture, but also the continuing testimony of the Holy Spirit in the life the church. Bavinck has a thick account of Sola Scriptura in that he does not perceive Sola Scriptura as separating itself from the tradition, but rather continually forming and shaping the confession of the church.<sup>71</sup> In this way, tradition is “the method by which the Holy Spirit causes the truth of scripture to pass into the consciousness and life of the church.”<sup>72</sup> Thus the theologian continually must heed scripture, the standardized norm of dogmatics, while also attending to the historic

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<sup>69</sup> Bavinck, “The Pros and Cons,” 94, 98. For a leveling of all differences see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Bavinck, “The Pros and Cons,” 94.

<sup>71</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the ‘Solos’ in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 143. This terminology of a ‘thick’ Sola Scriptura is pulled from Vanhoozer. Vanhoozer like Bavinck argues for a *Sola Scriptura* in which Scripture (canonic principle) and tradition (the catholic principle) both have an appointed roles in the communicative action of the Triune God, in which the reading of Scriptura always must account for the interpretation of the community.

<sup>72</sup> *RD I*, 494.

confession of the church and the continued communicative action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>73</sup>

Bavinck explains how theology thus has a unique organic task:

The only true principle of the dogmatic system is the one that appoints every single truth its unique place within the organic whole, the one that places clearly in the light the relation of every truth with the principium and with all other particular truths, and in that manner unfolds organically on all sides in the multiplicity of truths in order again to be brought together organically into the truth itself. Seeking that principle, and from it to draw forth the entire edifice of the truths of dogmatics, is the postulate of the science of theology.<sup>74</sup>

One may notice in this description a category that falls beyond scripture, and beyond the tradition of the church, with “every single truth” within the organic whole. The organic interconnectedness of all knowledge requires Bavinck to consider beyond the material objects of scripture and tradition all other fields of knowledge that may shed light on theology. Brock and Sutanto helpfully identify this as part of Bavinck’s three-fold reformed-catholicity in which the third principle is to “search for what is true and valid no matter where it is found.”<sup>75</sup> This dovetails with the third principle that Bavinck identifies in “Pros and Cons” that of recognizing the need to do theology that answers the questions and addresses the needs of one’s time.<sup>76</sup> In his lecture *Modernisme en Orthodoxie* Bavinck suggests theology itself necessarily must be contextual and thereby considering truth wherever it is found:

The whole of Christian theology is even built on the assumption that it cannot consist in a literalistic reproduction of the Holy Scriptures but that it must develop itself independently and freely, bound only to its object, taking a position in special revelation and thereby conjoin itself to the consciousness and life of the times in which it appears and labors... We assert the right to teach, using all the resources that science and culture put in our service, in order to better understand God’s truth

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<sup>73</sup> *MO*, 79. “However high we may estimate the confessions of the church, they are a “standardized norm,” subservient to Holy Scripture, and thus always remain subject to revision and expansion.”

<sup>74</sup> Bavinck, “The Pros and Cons,” 96. Bavinck does not mean ‘postulate’ in the kantian sense of the word, rather simply that theology assumes the existence of the unity-in-diversity of knowledge explicated in the quote.

<sup>75</sup> Sutanto and Brock, “Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Eclecticism,” 317.

<sup>76</sup> Bavinck, “The Pros and Cons,” 96.

in general and special revelation and make it our spiritual possession more intimately than before.<sup>77</sup>

Thus for Bavinck theology has a wholly organic character. It must be done under the conditions of one's own time, being subject to the material norm of scripture, while necessarily taking place within the church addressing the needs of the time and thus participating in the organic interconnectedness of knowledge both historically and experientially. Theology then functions among the sciences as one in which it provides unity, purpose, and coherence to knowledge while also having its own unique object and method.

#### *Bavinck's Methodology in the DDS*

In this section of the paper, we will explore the methodological principles of (1) confessional, (2) scriptural, and, (3) contextual in Herman Bavinck's *DDS*. Prior to jumping directly into Bavinck's methodology it will be helpful to briefly situate Bavinck's method within Reformed orthodoxy, and then the place of *DDS* in the structure of his doctrine of God. This will aid us in the task of drawing out continuities and discontinuities with Aquinas.

Dolf te Velde in *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy* notes six characteristic features of Reformed orthodox methodology from the late 16th century onward: a) the starting point is God (archetype) and the normative source of theology is his scripture (ectypal). b) The archetypal/ectypal feature "aims for conformity between knowledge and object in theology" in particular conformity to the divine archetype. c) Utilizes scripture in two ways: first, "detailed exegesis" second, "conceptual meaning, implications and relations" are drawn out. d) Revelation is more closely associated with special rather than general revelation. e) Philosophy and reason are introduced to play an instrumental role. f)

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<sup>77</sup> *MO*," 106-107.



presuppositions of certain metaphysical truths (major) that are then confirmed or altered by scripture (minor) forming a mixed syllogism.<sup>78</sup>

There is clear continuity between Bavinck and Reformed orthodoxy from the late 16th century onward. Most notably the archetypal/ectypal program of theology, the role the organic motif plays in providing continuity between subject and object, and the normative role of scripture. Where there is a point of disjuncture is Bavinck's distinct view of general revelation. It would be wrong to assert Bavinck is favorable towards natural theology, but rather he affirms a pre-cognitive and primordial knowledge of God, in that it is not a "rational category" but a "psychological one" as Sutanto has indicated.<sup>79</sup> In this manner, one cannot conflate natural theology with general revelation, but rather knowledge of God "is an assumed consciousness that is part of one's existence in the world."<sup>80</sup> Alternatively, in Reformed scholastics it is conceived of as slightly different not as "consciousness" but as (potential) knowledge of common notions.

## II. Theology, Method, Aquinas DDS

The task of this section is to articulate the theological method of Thomas Aquinas in formulating his *DDS* in his *Summa Theologica*. While it is possible to identify nearly every Anglophone scholar who has touched Bavinck's methodology, this is nearly an unimaginable task for Aquinas, as Fergus Kerr has observed, "Current readings of Thomas's work are so conflicting and incommensurable, that integrating them into a single interpretation seems impossible."<sup>81</sup> This section will first consider the place of theology among the sciences for Aquinas and then, examine his theological method. Since this section of the paper will

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<sup>78</sup> Dolf te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School: A Study in Method and Content* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 109.

<sup>79</sup> Sutanto, "Neo-Calvinism and General Revelation," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (Forthcoming 2018): prepub 1-18, 18.

<sup>80</sup> Sutanto, "Neo-Calvinism and General Revelation," 5.

<sup>81</sup> Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 15-16.

engage the broad theological structure of his *Summa*, we will inevitably be forced to consider two broad-streams of thinking on Aquinas' methodology.<sup>82</sup> Third, it will display Aquinas' method in his *DDS*. Aquinas methodology will be ultimately be viewed through the lens of Bavinck as we decipher how Bavinck consciously differentiates himself from Aquinas. This necessarily means the paper addresses a particular Aquinas and cannot be applied wholesale to the various streams of his interpreters.

*Theology King of the Sciences*<sup>83</sup>

Aquinas views 'sacred doctrine' or theology as a *scientia*, by *scientia* (science) he means "branch of knowledge."<sup>84</sup> For Thomas each science has their own separate principium. He follows the three-fold division of the sciences as set forth by Aristotle, which he seems to appropriate through Boethius.<sup>85</sup> This threefold science is broken into natural philosophy, mathematics, and theology. Although throughout his *Summa* Aquinas seems to speak of only two kinds of sciences:

We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some, which proceed from principles known by the natural light . . . There are also some which proceed from the principles known by the light of a higher science: . . . So it is that sacred doctrine is a science, namely the science of God and the Blessed.<sup>86</sup>

In Q79 of the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas writes that the scope of the human intellect is that of being in general.<sup>87</sup> With each science concerned with a different hierarchy of being.

Theology then studies the branch of knowledge concerned with sacred doctrine. Unlike the

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<sup>82</sup> As stated it would be impossible to capture every view on Aquinas, but it is important enough to state at least a distinction otherwise my later arguments could be simply disregarded as ignoring the other position.

<sup>83</sup> "King" as opposed to Bavinck's "Queen."

<sup>84</sup> Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae: A Guide and Commentary* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De Trinitate of Boethius*. Trans. A. Mauer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1963).

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948), I, Q1, 2A. (Hereafter *ST*.)

<sup>87</sup> *ST*, I.79.2.

other sciences, which can be understood through natural reasoning alone the divine science is to be understood through the articles of faith.<sup>88</sup>

In *SCG* Aquinas picks up the conversation of how divine truths are acquired, in particular the relation between faith and reason. Aquinas argues that not all things can be known in the same way.<sup>89</sup> He writes of two fold kind of knowledge: reasonable and mysterious.<sup>90</sup> What can be known then depends on the origin of the knowledge. Since knowledge of a thing is knowledge of the thing itself (its substance). “And so those things that do not fall under the senses cannot be grasped by the human intellect except in so far as they knowledge of them is gathered from sensible things.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, some truths of God can be known through the sensible but others cannot. “By virtue of the light of natural reason we abstract from our experience of material things the very natures or forms that things themselves have, and we make judgments about things.”<sup>92</sup> However, we are not naturally attuned to the divine.<sup>93</sup> Scripture also gives testimony to the truth.<sup>94</sup>

This twofold kind of knowledge in mystery and reason suggests for Aquinas that we should inspect that which can be known by reason. However, knowledge of God ultimately rests not on reason, but faith. “That is why it was necessary that the unshakeable certitude and pure truth concerning divine things should be presented to men by way of faith.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Shawn Floyd, “Achieving a Science of Sacred Doctrine,” *Heythrop Journal* 47 (2006): 1-15, 2. Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae* (England, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 23. “It refers to the doctrine of faith, which has received its dogmatic formulations throughout the Christian tradition.”

<sup>89</sup> *SCG*, I.3.1.

<sup>90</sup> *SCG*, I.3.2.

<sup>91</sup> *SCG*, I.3.3.

<sup>92</sup> James Brent, “Thomas Aquinas” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, ed. William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 408-419, 409.

<sup>93</sup> *SCG*, I.3.6. “Our eye is attuned to the divine like a nocturnal owl to the sun.”

<sup>94</sup> *SCG*, I.3.7.

<sup>95</sup> *SCG*, I.4.5.

Therefore, in divine mercy all truths that are available by human reason are accessed by faith (Eph. 4:17-18, Isaiah 54:13).<sup>96</sup>

*Aquinas' Theological Method*

The *Summa's* structure is based on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and follows a medieval theological arc of the journey of creatures from a divine origin to a divine end.<sup>97</sup> Thomas describes in the prologue to question two the broad movement of the work: (1) God, (2) the movement of creatures to God, and (3) Christ, who as man is the way to God. The first volume contains both (1) God and (2) the first half of the movement of creatures to God. This is structured as: A) Sources for theology (Q.1), B) God's being (Q. 2-43), C) God's created effects (Q.44-74), D) man (Q.75-102), and E) divine government. For our purposes, the structure of the first 43 questions is generally considered as: i) God's essence (Q.2-26), ii) the divine persons (Q.27-43). A Catholic reading that was introduced in the renaissance by Thomas Catejan has argued this division in the first 43 questions should be understood as *de deo uno* (On the One God) and *de deo trino* (On the Triune God). This divide has carried with it a division of sources with *de deo uno* suggested as available by reason alone, while *de deo trino* requires faith knowledge through revelation.<sup>98</sup>

This division naturally created two distinct readings of what Aquinas is doing in the first 43 questions. If one does not allow for the split between faith and reason and perceives them as integrated in the *Summa* they may affirm Gilles Emery and his reading, he states, "(Thomas) has no treatise 'of the One God' separated from the treatise of the Trinity, but simply two approaches to the same God depending on whether one considers in him what is

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<sup>96</sup> *SCG*, I.4.6-7.

<sup>97</sup> Mark D. Jordan, "Structure," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Summa Theologiae* ed. Philip McCosker and Denys Turner (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 34-47.

<sup>98</sup> Gilles Emery O.P., "Essentialism and Personalism in the Treatise on God in Saint Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 64 (200): 521-563, 562. Emery argues that to place these two categories in opposition to one another "would amount to a misunderstanding of Thomas' synthesis of relation."

common to the three persons or what is proper to each of them.”<sup>99</sup> One would then reject the dichotomy between the philosophical and theological approaches and see “the totality of the treatise of God concerns God the Trinity under the aspect of revelation.”<sup>100</sup> *Nonvelle theologie* such as Henri de Lubac similarly pushed back against the division between faith and reason at Vatican II.<sup>101</sup> Most recently, Protestant writer Stephen Long has argued for Thomas’ entire theological project as being one that integrates divine revelation with philosophy, with scripture being the primary arbiter of truth.<sup>102</sup>

Catholic scholar Thomas Joseph White, on the other hand, affirms a distinction between faith and reason in Aquinas.<sup>103</sup> As does Vatican I’s *Dei Filius*, which affirms a certain natural knowledge of God. Protestant scholars such as Paul Maxwell have critiqued Aquinas’ *DDS* specifically through his dualistic methodology.<sup>104</sup> Maxwell contends Aquinas falls into the category of Compositional Constructionism in his formulation of the *DDS*. By this he means Aquinas utilizes scripture and reason to formulate his doctrine of God with the methodological priority given to reason.<sup>105</sup> All this to suggest that identifying the place of reason and philosophy in Thomas’ theology is a difficult one and one cannot provide a

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<sup>99</sup> Gilles Emery, “Preface”, in Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas* (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria College, 2003), xx.

<sup>100</sup> Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 133.

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Swafford, *Nature and Grace: A New Approach to Thomistic Ressourcement* (Eugene, OR: PickWick Publications, 2014), 67-84. Swafford identifies de Lubac’s interpretation of Aquinas as one in which Aristotelian philosophy, Scripture, and patristic inheritance all stood side by side, in which it is never clear which one is ultimately ‘architectonic’ over the others.

<sup>102</sup> Stephen Long, *The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016). Tyler Wittman, “‘Not a God of Confusion but of Peace’: Aquinas and the Meaning of Divine Simplicity,” *Modern Theology* 32, no.2 (2016): 151-169.

<sup>103</sup> See Thomas Joseph White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

<sup>104</sup> Paul Maxwell, “The Formulation of Thomistic Simplicity: Mapping Aquinas’s Method for Configuring God’s Essence,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no.2 (2014): 371-403.

<sup>105</sup> Maxwell, “Mapping Aquinas’s Method,” 372. Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Creation: Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise and Good Creator* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 76. Alternatively, Levering argues, “When Aquinas reflects philosophically upon divine simplicity, then, he has in view divine revelation as the normative source of Christian knowledge of God.” Jordan Barrett, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 81. Barrett suggests Aquinas methodology should be read in light of its intention and therefore not be viewed as being controlled by natural reasoning.

comprehensive reading here, rather we must restrict our understanding to Bavinck's own reading.

Pim Valkenberg helpfully identifies Aquinas theological principles in the Summa: (1) God's knowledge and (2) reason.<sup>106</sup> Likewise, Timothy Smith identifies Aquinas theological method as one of (1) authority and (2) reason.<sup>107</sup> The first point is threefold; it includes scripture, scripture as interpreted in the church, and philosophers. Valkenberg states:

Scripture for him (Aquinas) is Scripture-as-interpreted-in-the-Church, and in that specific sense the creed (summarizing the basic premises from Scripture) and the teachers of the Church (explaining and applying Scripture in different contexts) may be said to be apart of Scripture. Authoritative texts from the philosophers may be used as well in holy teaching, but these are extraneous and problem arguments that can only be used with reference to questions that can be known by natural reason.<sup>108</sup>

Having established the theological sources of Aquinas we now turn to evaluate specifically the sources utilized in his *DDS*. The table below shows the dialectic method of argument that Aquinas utilizes.<sup>109</sup>

**Table 1: Basic Structure of Aquinas *Quaestio***

- Question:  $p$  or not- $p$  (Then, supposing that the answer that will be proposed is not  $\neg p$ :-)
- A. Assertion  $p$ , preceded by *Videtur quod* . . . ('It seems that...')
  - B. A series of arguments (*rationes*), based on authority or reason, in favor of  $p$
  - C. A brief statement, usually from an authority, that not- $p$ , preceded by *Sed contra* ('But against (this)...')
  - D. A reasoned explanation by the author of why it is the case that not  $\neg p$  (This is often called the body of the *quaestio*.)
  - E. Counter-arguments (*solutiones*) to each of the arguments proposed in B, explaining why they do not give grounds for believing  $p$ .

<sup>106</sup> Pim Valkenberg, "Scripture," in *The Cambridge Companion to The Summa Theologiae* ed. Philip McCosker & Denys Turner (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 48-61, 53. Stephen Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980) 51. "For Aquinas, to speak of reason was to speak of the mind of man naturally exercising its own innate talents."

<sup>107</sup> Timothy Smith, "Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Theological Method" (PhD Diss. University of Notre Dame, 1999), 38.

<sup>108</sup> Valkenberg, "Scripture," 54.

<sup>109</sup> John Marenbon, "Method" in *The Cambridge Companion to The Summa Theologiae* ed. Philip McCosker & Denys Turner (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 74-84, 76. Reproduced in this chapter as Table 1.

Bavinck was critical of the dualism he believed to be in Aquinas' construction of knowledge, faith and reason, and the relation between nature and grace. Bavinck perceived Aquinas as having a dual level "mechanical" epistemology in which the first layer affirms a natural and rational foundation that is independent from the secondary supernatural level.<sup>110</sup> It is worth noting Bavinck uses "mechanical" as polemic device which is to be seen as the opposed to his "organic" rendering. In this "Catholic theology" Bavinck states, "knowing and believing, reason and authority, natural and supernatural revelation, occur dualistically side by side."<sup>111</sup> Importantly, Bavinck perceives this dualism as one of antithesis rather than synthesis.<sup>112</sup> He thinks this medieval scholastic method gives an *apriori* to reason apart from scripture and presses scripture into the "straitjacket of scholasticism", which he associates with Aquinas.<sup>113</sup>

This mechanical relation between faith and reason Bavinck argues led to a defect. He states:

The first (defect) were faith and reason, although (they) initially were closely united and harmoniously connected, (they) were soon after once again torn apart and loosely placed side by side. Each of the two brought its own set of truths. So, there were supernatural truths, which were accepted on the account of authority; and beside it stood also natural truths which could be found by reason. There exclusively and only faith alone was possible, here pure and accurate knowledge was accessible. The result was that these two truths were separated and stood side by side and finally some were even led to the opinion that truth itself was not one but that which was true in philosophy could in essence be false in theology, and vice versa.<sup>114</sup>

Sutanto in "Organic Knowing" commenting on this and other passages like it in Bavinck writes:

Bavinck understands Thomas to hold a vertical epistemological dualism, where there are natural, rational truths at the bottom with relative independence from the theological truths in the second level. The theological may confirm or clarify some

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<sup>110</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 110- 111.

<sup>111</sup> *RD I*, 304.

<sup>112</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 40-41.

<sup>113</sup> *RD I*, 423.

<sup>114</sup> *CW*, 17. Translation is Sutanto's from "Organic Knowing," 109.

aspects of the truths of reason, but this bottom level enjoys a high degree of epistemological self-sufficiency, despite it being soteriologically insufficient.<sup>115</sup>

As first identified by Sutanto Bavinck levels three criticisms of Aquinas in his prolegomena.<sup>116</sup> First, an insufficient appreciation for common grace. This highlights the a point of discontinuity between Aquinas and Bavinck in regards to the place of theology among the sciences. For Bavinck, the other sciences through common grace have the same *telos* as theology. However for Aquinas, according to Bavinck, the other sciences would have a purely natural *telos*, and therefore be separated from one another. The second criticism is a strong separation between nature and super-nature. According to Bavinck, the catholic division fails to uphold the organic connection between general and special revelation in this manner, reason gradually gains autonomy.<sup>117</sup>

The third critique is that Aquinas does not sufficiently grounds his theology in scripture. Bavinck writing on the structure of Aquinas' *Summa* states, "Thomas's division not only differs from that of Bonaventure but is in many respects inferior to it. While in part I, qu. 1, there is a lengthy discussion of the essence of theology, the doctrine of scripture is not discussed at all."<sup>118</sup> Bavinck faults Aquinas with much of the scholastic focus on the preamble of faith, characteristically he upholds the Reformation as countering this and returning to starting theology with scripture.<sup>119</sup> We now move to identifying Aquinas' theological method in his *DDS*.

#### *Aquinas' Theological Method in the DDS*

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<sup>115</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 110-111.

<sup>116</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 111-114.

<sup>117</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 111.

<sup>118</sup> *RD* I, 99.

<sup>119</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 114.



The questions with which Aquinas begins his *DDS* with is the foundation of Aristotelian metaphysical categories.<sup>120</sup> Aquinas then proceeds to utilize these Aristotelian categories to construct the divine reality. What is interesting is to note how the different theological principles are used to answer or fill in these Aristotelian categories throughout the eight articles in Quaestio three. Of the eight articles, only four of the articles utilize scripture and of those four in half of them (articles 1 and 2) scripture is used not to fill the metaphysical category, but rather it creates dissonance for the dialectic.

Thomas begins his discussion on simplicity with “What God is not”, an apophatic move that shapes the direction of the questions. The eight articles follow Aristotelian logic, 1-8 and raise the question of God’s composition: (1a.) Whether God is a Body? It is to this question Aquinas answers with scripture: “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24). (2a) Whether God can be composed with matter and form, (3a) whether God is the same as his essence, (4a) whether Essence and Existence are the same in God? (5a) whether God is contained in genus, (6a) whether in God there are any accidents, (7a) whether God is altogether simple, (8a) whether God enters into the composition of other things.<sup>121</sup>

Aquinas does not leave it at a strict apophaticism but asserts that simplicity does give us some cataphatic knowledge of God. First, God must be prior to the creation of all beings for composite beings must be created. Second, God must be the first cause if he is simple, for all composite things require a cause. Third, God must be pure act, for all things composed require potentiality. Fourthly, God’s essence is identical to his attributes.<sup>122</sup> From here we may suggest how Bavinck may have interpreted Aquinas’ method in his *DDS*.

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<sup>120</sup> Maxwell, “Mapping Aquinas’s Method,” 373.

<sup>121</sup> *ST*, I, Q3

<sup>122</sup> *ST*, I, Q3, A7.

### III. Continuities and Discontinuities in Method for Aquinas and Bavinck (A Bavinckian Reading)

At this point in the paper, we will highlight the continuities and discontinuities between Aquinas and Bavinck in their methods of approaching the *DDS*. First, it is worth noting that both figures have different contextual, confessional, and ecclesial backgrounds. This inevitably bears weight on their methodologies with Aquinas approaching *DDS* through the medieval theological dialectic of his *Summa*, and Bavinck's method slotting fittingly into proto-typical reformed orthodox approach to the doctrine of God.

Secondly, theology places a different role among the sciences. For Bavinck theology is the "organic" servant queen that provides unity to the diverse sciences and pervades his eclectic method. For Aquinas theology also has a royal role among the sciences, but it is mechanical and severed from rather than serves the other sciences, hence why in this thesis we refer to it as the king of the sciences. Theology is disconnected from the other sciences and in this manner like a king separated from of the sciences. Aquinas like Bavinck does give science its own distinct principles. However unlike him, Aquinas does not perceive theology as providing the connecting role between the sciences, but rather being disconnected is from them, hence why Bavinck may suggest that for Aquinas natural reason as has its own autonomy.

The third discontinuity can be seen at the sources of theology. Bavinck's threefold principium: (1) confessional, (2) scripture, (3) and contextual compared to Aquinas twofold: (1) authoritative texts, (2) reason. These principium represent different methodological values when approaching the construction of the doctrine. Of course, at this level there are certain continuities both Aquinas and Bavinck value the confessional nature of theology with both being receptive to the received teaching of the church. However, there is also discontinuity here with Aquinas giving a higher status to the teaching of the church, and

Bavinck retaining the Protestant material norm of scripture. In Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* he suggests that the Reformation introduced two changes into the understanding of general revelation: First, included in special revelation, by God, were those truths, which were knowable by nature. Second, to begin to perceive these truths in nature one had to be illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, humans need the glasses of faith to see the work of God's hands.<sup>123</sup> Thus the dualism of natural vs. supernatural is replaced by one of sin and grace.<sup>124</sup>

The fourth discontinuity can be seen in the application of the method to the *DDS*. Bavinck clearly progresses through the ecclesial, scriptural, and contextual levels of his theological method. However, for Aquinas it is unclear what guiding role authoritative texts, in particular scripture, are rendering on his construction at this point, as noted by the controversial interpretations of the use of philosophy in *de deo uno* and Bavinck's reading of Aquinas as dualist. In particular, we may note that while Bavinck enters into the attributes via the divine names (through God's self-disclosure of himself in scripture), Aquinas provides the attributes presumably through the metaphysics of Aristotle. At this point, it seems fair to suggest that rather than associating Bavinck strictly with Aquinas in his *DDS*, it seems better to assert Bavinck is performing a distinct theological task, in which Aquinas is one of many theological sources that he is calling upon for his own theological purposes.

In conclusion, we may assert that because of Bavinck's eclectic catholicity he clearly appropriates some level of Thomistic thinking in his explicit identification of the attributes of God with God's essence. This should not be understated Bavinck is not the antithesis of Thomas. Moreover, in theology proper, Bavinck inherited much of the shared vocabulary,

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<sup>123</sup> *RD I*, 304. See Sutanto, "Neo-Calvinism and General Revelation," 1-18.

<sup>124</sup> *RD I*, 620-621. Allen, "Knowledge of God," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church catholic*, ed. Michael Allen & Scott Swain (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 23. Allen points to Bavinck as an example for Protestants that all knowledge must ultimately be viewed in light of the knowledge of God.

grammar, and tradition of Nicaea and Augustine that Aquinas also utilized. Again, Bavinck is not to be pitted against Thomas understanding of simplicity here. However, one should not draw a straight line between their constructions based off of the evidence of difference in methodology. The differing royal roles theology plays amongst the diverse fields of knowledge, the differing principium, and lastly the application of these principiums in support of their theological methods.

**PART II**

**EXPOSITION OF BAVINCK'S DIVINE SIMPLICITY**

## CHAPTER IV: EXPOSITION OF BAVINCK'S DIVINE SIMPLICITY

In chapter four, direct attention is given to Bavinck's *DDS*. He primarily utilizes *DDS* for two functions in his doctrine of God. The first, is to facilitate diversity. The diversity of attributes rather than being a problem for divine simplicity is the basis for a proper understanding of God. The second, is to safeguard divine unity, the function typically conceived of simplicity. This chapter builds upon the previous three, as it displays Bavinck's rhapsodic, catholic, and confessional methodology while distinguishing him from his sources and accentuating his distinctiveness.

### I. *DDS* in the Divine Names

Bavinck introduces simplicity in his section on divine names as a way to facilitate the diversity of the attributes. He primarily wants to uphold two ideas of simplicity in this section: (1) God's essence is identical with his attributes, also known as the identity thesis and (2) simplicity enables to talk of the manifold abundance of God's essence with distinct attributes. Both of these points will be elucidated below by identifying Bavinck's eclectic engagement with the history of the doctrine and what he appropriates or critiques from each thinker.

Bavinck begins with deviant constructions of *DDS* prior to proceeding to his positive exposition. The first perverse construction he critiques is that of Eunomius. He begins by defining Eunomius' position as: "God is 'simple,' totally non-composite: hence, the attributes we ascribe to him are identical with his being and can only differ among themselves in our minds, that is, subjectively."<sup>125</sup> Eunomius takes it a step further and suggests that believers must have a fully adequate knowledge of the divine being. In this

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<sup>125</sup> *RD* II, 124.

manner, Eunomius takes God's "nonbegottenness" and suggests that that all of God's attributes coincide with it. However, since the Son is begotten, he cannot truly be divine.<sup>126</sup>

He transitions to the middle ages, to Bishop Gilbert Porretan who argues for true ontological distinction between God's essence and persons, and possibly an ontological distinction between the various attributes. He follows this with descriptions of William Occam and Duns Scotus. For Occam the attributes only differed "in subjective reasoning," while for Scotus the attributes differed "not in objective or in subjective reason but formally."<sup>127</sup> His historical analysis takes him to Gregory Palamas, who he suggests separated God's attributes from the essence in his eternal emissions scheme.

Bavinck then leads us to a description of some modern theologians. First, Spinoza whom he suggests characterizes the attributes of God as both subjective and objective depending on how he is understood - subjective due to the activity of the intellect or objective as constitutive of the essence. Second, he argues pantheism has no room for the attributes of God because God becomes conflated with the universe. He suggests Schleiermacher understood the attributes in this manner, describing them as purely subjective, as we relate to them through "the feeling of absolute dependence." This kind of reading Bavinck argues fails to express anything of God's unknowable essence or his relation to the world, since it inherently implies pure subjectivity with no objective basis.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009). 97. Radde-Gallwitz is helpful in understanding Bavinck's description of Eunomius: "For Eunomius, a genuine knowledge of something is knowledge of its essence. A theological epistemology will, then, specify whether and in what sense humans can come to know the divine essence. And the doctrine of divine simplicity implies that all true claims made about God are predicated of God's substance (there being no non-substantial or non-essential properties of God). Consequently, the doctrine of divine simplicity (understood in terms of the identity thesis) allows Eunomius to claim that he does in fact know God in a non-relative, non-subjective manner." In other words, there is a conflation with God's essence and attributes.

<sup>127</sup> RD II, 124-125.

<sup>128</sup> RD II, 125.

Bavinck then turns to the norm of scripture and received tradition of the church. He argues that revelation gives us the duty to confront the opinions of the above thinkers. That believers must hold in their hands that every attribute is identical with the divine being and that nevertheless these attributes can be distinguished from one another. He turns to Basil and Gregory of Nyssa as examples of those who argued against Eunomius and presented a God who is “simple, and transcends all composition, yet on the other, (the attributes) they do not differ only in name.”<sup>129</sup> They accomplish this Bavinck avers through being able to speak both of God as simple and being able to conceptualize distinctions in the divine nature.

Radde-Gallwitz is helpful at clarifying what Bavinck may have been arguing. In his work *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* he demonstrates how Basil and Gregory predicated a number of terms to the divine substance while also arguing for the *DDS*. Basil and Gregory maintain that the attributes are identical with the essence of God, while also claiming that they are not interchangeable and can be distinguished. In this manner, “Each attribute expresses something special” and mutually entails the other properties.<sup>130</sup> Radde-Gallwitz states, “With Gregory, we are far from holding that divine simplicity entails that God only has single property... in his hands, the doctrine of simplicity actually comes to entail that God has multiple properties... that are

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<sup>129</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 17: “Gregory defends and clarifies Basil’s negative doctrine of simplicity, including the defense of conceptualization. But Gregory expands on Basil by developing an account of ‘goods,’ that is, God’s power, wisdom, life, goodness, and so forth, according to which these attributes are inter-entailing in the way the virtues reciprocally entail one another. This means that God’s justice and wisdom go together. This reciprocity or inter-entailment of the divine goods is important: it implicates that God is so far from having just one essential attribute that, precisely because God is simple and unmixed with his opposite, God necessarily has multiple attributes. For Gregory (and it seems Basil before him), the goods are inherent in the divine nature without being identical with it. They are *propria* of that nature.”

<sup>130</sup> RD II, 126.



reciprocally entailing.”<sup>131</sup> Following his engagement with Basil and Gregory, Bavinck transitions to Augustine to drive home his point of the manifold abundance of God’s essence.

In speaking of the ‘simplicity of God’ it is not Augustine’s intent to take anything away from God, but on the contrary, to conceive of God in the fullness of his being. With this in view he speaks of the ‘simple multiplicity’ or the ‘manifold simplicity’ present in God, and calls God’s wisdom ‘simply manifold and uniformly multiform.’”<sup>132</sup>

It is exactly this sort of simplicity that Bavinck strives to construct, one in which simplicity allows for multiplicity, and God’s diversity of attributes does not conflict with the unity of his essence.

Bavinck then shifts the discussion to the protestant scholastic distinction of *ratio ratiocinans* (mere reasoning) “a distinction by reason reasoning; i.e., a merely rational distinction resting only on the operation of the reason and not on the thing”<sup>133</sup> and *ratio ratiocinata* (rational analysis of a thing) “a distinction by reason of analysis” that “represents no distinction in the thing but a truth of reasoning concerning the thing.”<sup>134</sup> This terminology was employed by protestant scholastics in attempt to answer the dilemma of the diversity of the attributes. Bavinck may be alluding here to the *Leiden Synopsis*, which was originally published in 1625. Bavinck was the editor of an 1881 reprint. In the section of the *Synopsis* on simplicity, the writers argue that the difference between the attributes does not entail a “real distinction” rather “a relational or rational distinction, in so far as they differ in

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<sup>131</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 212.

<sup>132</sup> RD II, 127. Bavinck is citing Augustine, *The Trinity* trans. Edmund Hill (New York, NY: New City Press, 2015), VI, 4. Augustine, *City of God*, Trans. Marcus Dodds (New York, NY: Barnes & Nobles, 2006), XII, 18.

<sup>133</sup> Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1985), 306. Muller suggests the definition of “mere reasoning.”

<sup>134</sup> Muller, *Dictionary of Latin*, 306. Muller suggests the definition of “rational analysis of a thing.”

creatures and our perception with these properties God himself grants to us the knowledge of who God is, and what he is like.”<sup>135</sup> In this vein Bavinck offers a solution:

...Diversity is rooted in God’s revelation itself. For it is not we who call God by these names. We do not invent them... But it is God himself who reveals all his perfections and puts his name on our lips. It is he who gives himself these names and who, despite our opposition maintains them. It is of little use to deny his righteousness: every day he demonstrates this quality in history, and so it is with *all* his attributes. He brings them out despite us. The final goal of all his ways is that his name will shine out in all his works and be written on everyone’s forehead (Rev. 22:4). For that reason we have no choice but to name him with the many names his revelation furnishes us.<sup>136</sup>

Subsumed then under the divine names is the concept of divine simplicity, in which God’s attributes are identical with his essence, however, we may speak of God as having a multiplicity of attributes for that is precisely how God communicates himself to us in his revelation. Divine simplicity therefore does not compete with the diversity of attributes, but rather facilitates it. Simplicity “speaks of him as the absolute fullness of life.”<sup>137</sup> It is the doctrine that magnifies before us the profundity of God’s infinite essence, “so rich that no creature can grasp it all at once.”<sup>138</sup>

Bavinck makes two brief assertions at the end of this section on simplicity. First, he argues that it is the relation between creatures and God that varies; God remains the same but the angle of the relation shifts. This language is akin to the *Leiden Synopsis*, although Bavinck references Augustine, Moses Maimonides, Vermigli, Bernardinus de Moor and Basil in his support.<sup>139</sup> It is interesting to highlight the eclectic nature of this group, Augustine is known by most, but highly esteemed by Bavinck who suggests in his first volume that

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<sup>135</sup> Te Velde ed., et al, *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, Latin Text and English Translation*, Vol. I/Disputations 1-23 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 164-165.

<sup>136</sup> RD II, 127.

<sup>137</sup> RD II 127.

<sup>138</sup> RD II, 127.

<sup>139</sup> Perhaps unintentionally, but noteworthy Vermigli is among the first Reformed scholastics and De Moor is the very last.

Augustine is the premier theologian of the church.<sup>140</sup> Maimonides on the other hand, is an apophatic Jewish theologian and philosopher. His appearance is interesting, if only because Bavinck is clearly not wholesale endorsing him, although he wields him here in his support.<sup>141</sup> Vermigli and de Moor are two Reformed theologians who we would expect Bavinck to cite in support of his articulation. Lastly, Bavinck's use of Basil, the early church father, is the final peg in a multifarious group of theologians.<sup>142</sup> In many ways, this group is a prime example of Bavinck's rhapsody. Bavinck introduces some of these thinkers early on in his discussion and then redeploys them for his own use.

Second, he asserts that it is the analogical tenor of theological language that allows his creatures to speak of the diversity of the attributes. "In this connection, we must remember that God can act in so many different qualities and be called by so many different names, because there is kinship between him and his creatures. If this kinship did not exist, all the names would be untrue."<sup>143</sup> This correspondence then between the Creator and the creature also allows us to see the diversity of the attributes in a subjective manner that truly corresponds in some way to the object of that confession. As Bavinck states:

So, referring to God by all these names, we indeed speak imperfectly, in finite terms, in limited human ways, yet not falsely... it is always the same being that confronts us in these names, each name by itself gives us a succinct statement of what that being truly is in its infinite fullness... There is no name capable of expressing God's being with full adequacy. Given that reality, many names serve to give us the impression of his all-transcending grandeur.<sup>144</sup>

In this manner, then we may speak of different attributes though God is not composed of many attributes. We speak as creatures that must mind the "ontological" gap, and recognize

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<sup>140</sup> *RD* I, 136, 139. "Augustine has been and is the dogmatician of the Christian church."

<sup>141</sup> Maimonides is cited earlier in *RD* II, 108 fn15 as one in support of ectypal theology.

<sup>142</sup> *RD* II, 127.

<sup>143</sup> *RD* II, 127.

<sup>144</sup> *RD* II, 127.

that through revelation God gives us a diversity of names to call him by that each scratch the surface of the God who is manifoldly simple.

It is interesting to note that Thomas Aquinas is nearly absent from the above section.<sup>145</sup> Bavinck gives no space to expositing Thomas views in this section. Thomas is restricted to a footnote in the final paragraph, in which he is listed amongst the other theologians whom Bavinck believes would support his final construction. This is important for two reasons: First, it gives support to the thesis that Bavinck's *DDS* should not be identified solely with Thomas, but should be viewed as doing something eclectic and unique to his own dogmatic task. In conjunction with this, it supports the rhapsody theme in which we are to view Bavinck as freely pulling from theologians as he sees fit for his theological needs. Second, it helpfully curtails any suggestion that Bavinck should be pitted against Thomas in his construction. Bavinck clearly views him as an ally here, though not his sole team member. We now transition to the second section in which divine simplicity occurs.

## **II. *DDS* in the Incommunicable Attributes**

In the final section of Bavinck's incommunicable attributes he approaches the *DDS* once again. He splits this final section into two parts: unity and simplicity. Here, Bavinck continues to the two tenets from his previous section, that is (1) God's essence is identical with his attributes, and (2) simplicity allows us to talk of distinct attributes in God's manifold simplicity. However, in this section Bavinck is also responding to two critiques of simplicity. He argues (1) that simplicity is not a metaphysical abstraction and (2) that it is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity.

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<sup>145</sup> Aquinas' influence is likely present in the later writings Bavinck engaged with, even though he is not explicitly referenced. However, it is noteworthy that Bavinck does not build his *DDS* around Aquinas.

Bavinck begins this simplicity section suggesting simplicity facilitates divine abundance.<sup>146</sup> In this section, Bavinck catalogs a few scriptural references in support of simplicity although the scripture listed is not necessarily defending explicitly simplicity; they defend the predication of a substantive with God in defense of the identification of God with his attributes (Jer. 10:10; 23:6; John 1:4–5, 9; 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 John 1:5; 4:8.).

Bavinck then asserts, “On account of his absolute perfection, every attribute is identical with his essence.”<sup>147</sup> After making this assertion, Bavinck catalogs how the confessing church has viewed this doctrine. Irenaeus is likely the earliest church father to make statements on simplicity and therefore it makes sense for Bavinck to begin his eclectic discussion there.<sup>148</sup> Bavinck also cites Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Athanasius. These three church fathers each have similar conceptions of simplicity and provide support for his reference to Irenaeus as representative of that historical period. He returns to Eunomius, who appeared in the earlier section, only to highlight the Cappadocians movement against him in their defense of the diversity of divine names and attributes. Once again then we have an emphasis on the diversity of the God in his description of simplicity.

This is followed by linking the norm of the doctrine of divine simplicity to Augustine. In particular, Bavinck cites Augustine’s *The Trinity* and *The Confessions*. The section he cites from *The Trinity* contrasts being and nonbeing and argues that God is a single simple

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<sup>146</sup> RD II, 173.

<sup>147</sup> RD II, 173. (This translation is adjusted from Bolt’s).

<sup>148</sup> Bavinck’s citation of Irenaeus *Against Heresies* is interesting since only recently have scholars suggested that the main thrust of *Against Heresies* may be DDS. Richard A. Norris, “The Transcendence and Freedom of God: Irenaeus, the Greek Tradition and Gnosticism,” in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant*, ed. William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken, Theologie Historique (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 88. In *Against Heresies* I, 12 he highlights the singularity of will, thought, and power. In *Against Heresies* II, 13 Irenaeus argues for that Father as “a simple, uncompounded Being.” In *Against Heresies* II, 28 he states, “God is all mind, all reason, all active spirit, all light, and always exists one and the same, as it is both beneficial for us to think of God, and as we learn regarding Him from the Scriptures, such feelings and divisions (of operation) cannot fittingly be ascribed to Him.” Barrett, *Divine Simplicity*, 39–40: Barrett summarizes Irenaeus position sufficiently, “Divine simplicity means that God is completely all that he is, without division, and truly (not literally) is these names because scripture names him as such.”

substance not composed of accidents. God is not composed of parts.<sup>149</sup> From Augustine's *Confession* he cites a passage, which exalts the immutability of God, and another that waxes of the mutability of the created world.<sup>150</sup> Bavinck argues, "there are differences between existing, living, knowing, and willing" among creatures, "but in God everything is one; God is all, that he has. He is his own wisdom, his own life; being and living coincide with him."<sup>151</sup> Bavinck views this as the confession of the church since Augustine, noting in his favor John of Damascus, the scholastics, and all of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed thought. Two things are worth drawing our attention to from this statement. First, Bavinck clearly does not perceive his construction to be an aberration from the received doctrine of the church. Second, the eclectic group of scholars footnoted spans the history of the church: Anselm, Peter Lombard, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Dionysius Petavius, Giovanni Perrone, Joseph Kleutgen, Johann Gerhard, and a host of Reformed thinkers.

Following this Bavinck outlines seven groups or figures that have rejected or are critical of divine simplicity. Bavinck does not address their critiques individually, but he constructs his simplicity with them in mind. The first theologian Bavinck addresses is Eunomius. As he indicates Eunomius did uphold a version of simplicity, but according to Bavinck Eunomius' view of God's "nonbegottenness" has an ill effect on his view of

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<sup>149</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, V, 4; VII, 5.

<sup>150</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* trans. E.B. Pusey (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), VII, 11; XI, 5.

<sup>151</sup> GD II, 166-167: "Bij schepselen is er verschil tusschen zijn, leven, kennen, willen; er is graadoonderscheid onder hen; er zijn schepselen, die allen zijn, andere die ook leven, en nog weer andere, die ook denken. Maar bij God is alles een; God is alles, wat Hij heeft. Hij is zijn eigen wijsheid, zijn eigen leven; zijn en leven zijn bij Hem een." This too he supports with citations from Augustine this time the *City of God*, VIII, 6; X, 10 and *The Trinity*, XV, 5. In this section Augustine is arguing that God is the attributes in himself and that all the predicates of God should be understood as not qualities but as naming the one simple substance. Bavinck also cites David Gangauf, *Des Heiligen Augustinus speculative Lehre von Gott dem Dreieinigen* (Augsburgh: Schmidt, 1883), 147-157.

simplicity. “This one attribute, he believed, made all the others superfluous and useless.”<sup>152</sup>

The second group he mentions are the Anthropomorphites whom he quickly notes rejected simplicity because of their view that God had a body.

The third group critical of the Christian understanding of simplicity is that of Arabian philosophers. Bavinck quotes neo-scholastic and Thomas scholar Albert Stöckl’s work *Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* in which Stöckl writes of the Arabian philosopher Averroes assessment of Christian theology’s divine simplicity. According to Averroes simplicity is incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, for the three persons must be regarded as truly different from the divine substance or result in being “just names added to the substance.” Stöckl defends the *DDS* by referencing key components of the *DDS* and pointing out Averroes shortcomings in his understanding of the Trinity.<sup>153</sup>

Bavinck next mentions Duns Scotus and Socinians as having diverged from the historical understanding of divine simplicity. Scotus he writes, “taught the doctrine of God’s simplicity,” however; “he assumed that the attributes are formally distinct from each other as well as from the divine essence.”<sup>154</sup> Of all the groups Bavinck engages he gives the most sustained attention to the Socinianism. Appealing to scripture, the Socinians denied the *DDS* among other doctrines such as the divinity of Christ and the Trinity. *The Racovian Catechism*,

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<sup>152</sup> RD II, 174. Moreover, if “nonbegottenness” is the fundamental property of God, the divinity of Christ could be endangered. Radde-Gallwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 105-108. 107. Radde-Gallwitz concurs with Bavinck’s reading when he concludes of Eunomius understanding of “ingenerate,” he says, “So then, when Eunomius completes his argument by elimination, he has not only ruled out the view that ‘ingenerate’ is a non-essential name of God. He has also ruled out the view that it is one of many distinct titles of God’s essence. This cannot be because such names would be distinct not only from one another but also from God, and hence ruin divine simplicity. Rather, ‘ingenerate’ must refer to the one essential property that is identical with God’s essence. Bavinck cites here Joseph Schwane’s *Dogmengeschichte: Der Patristische* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1895), 21. Schwane argues that for Eunomius God’s nonbegottenness makes all other attributes “superfluous.”

<sup>153</sup> Albert Stöckl, *Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Vol. II (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1865), 89-90.

<sup>154</sup> RD II, 174. For an exposition of Scotus’ view of simplicity see Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15-31.

a Socinian catechism omits the attribute of simplicity.<sup>155</sup> Bavinck lists the concerns of a few Socinian theologians specifically, Jonas Schlichting, Johannes Volkelius, and Conrad Vorstius. Each of these theologians argues for realist distinctions in the doctrine of God. Moreover, the Socinian's divided the divine essence and the divine operations, to the effect that in his outward works God becomes dependent on his creatures.

Likewise, the sixth group, the Remonstrants did not believe that the scripture taught simplicity. In particular, the Remonstrants were concerned that simplicity was incompatible with divine freedom. Bavinck fairly asserts that Simon Episcopius, a Remonstrant leader, believed simplicity to be compatible with divine freedom even including simplicity among the attributes, however, other Remonstrant leaders such as Philip Limborch abandoned it from their works.

The final group he identifies as critical of simplicity is the modern articulations of pantheism. In particular, Bavinck focuses on Schleiermacher, for whom simplicity is, "the nonseparated and inseparable being-intertwined of all divine attributes and of all divine activities."<sup>156</sup> Bavinck evaluates divine simplicity as occupying a lower place among the attributes for Schleiermacher.<sup>157</sup> Bavinck mentions several other modern theologians who

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<sup>155</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees, F.S.A. (London, UK: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, Paternoster Row, 1818). Socinianism was strongly argued against by Dutch Reformed theologians earlier in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for example: S. Maresius, *Hydra Socinianismi Expugnata* (Groningen, 1651); P. Jasz-Berenyi, *Examen Doctrinae Ariano-Socinianae* (1662); J. Hoornbeeck, *Socinianismi Confutati* (3 vols.; Utrecht, 1650–1664); N. Arnold, *Religio Sociniana... Refutata* (Amsterdam, 1654); J. Cloppenburg, *Compendiolum Socinianismi Confutatum* (Franeker, 1651). Willem van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 136. Van Asselt interestingly notes among Reformed theology, "one can notice a response to Socinian theology in almost every locus of the systems of high orthodoxy."

<sup>156</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, Vol. 1 trans. Terrence Tice, Catherine Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), §56. I went with the updated translation, rather than the one present in RD II, 175 for its clarity.

<sup>157</sup> RD II, 175. I am primarily concerned with Bavinck's understanding of Schleiermacher's divine simplicity, though it is worth mentioning that others have suggested that Schleiermacher does have a fully orbbed conception of divine simplicity. See Gerhard Ebling, "Schleiermacher's Doctrine of the Divine Attributes," in *Schleiermacher as Contemporary*, ed. Robert Funk (New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1970), 125–175; Daniel J. Pedersen, "Schleiermacher and Reformed Scholastics on the Divine Attributes," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 17, no. 4 (2015): 413–431.



opposed *DDS* for two reasons in particular: “it is a metaphysical abstraction and inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>158</sup>

Bavinck then transitions to his own positive description of simplicity to respond to the critiques leveled against simplicity within his own modern context. He asserts that simplicity is taught in scripture not only wherever God is called “light,” “life,” and “love” but also because it is a necessary implication of the other attributes. This collection of scripture is the same group that Bavinck cited at the beginning of his discussion on simplicity in the divine names. Bavinck then gives an introduction to simplicity:

Simplicity here is the antonym of “compounded.” If God is composed of parts, like a body, or composed of *genus* (class) and *differentiae* (attributes of differing species belonging to the same *genus*), substance and accidents, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, essence and existence, then his perfection, oneness, independence, and immutability cannot be maintained. On that basis he is not the highest love, for then there is in him a subject who loves—which is one thing—as well as a love by which he loves—which is another. The same dualism would apply to all the other attributes. In that case God is not the One “than whom nothing better can be thought.”<sup>159</sup> Instead, God is uniquely his own, having nothing above him. Accordingly, he is completely identical with the attributes of wisdom, grace, and love, and so on. He is absolutely perfect, the One “than whom nothing higher can be thought.”<sup>160</sup>

After having asserted the validity of *DDS* from scripture, he suggests that simplicity makes sense of the whole of what we know to be true of God. Namely, that if God was composed of parts, it would destroy what Christians know to be self-evident from scripture, that God is

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<sup>158</sup> *RD* II, 174-175. Several of the sources Bavinck cites in this paragraph are defending the doctrine of simplicity as not contradictory to the Trinity, in particular William G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3d ed., (New York: Scribner, 1891-94), I, 338: Shedd states, “The simplicity of the Divine being is not contradictory to the trinity of his essence, because trinity does not denote three different essences, but one essence subsisting in three modes.”; Abraham Kuyper, *Ex ungue Leonem* (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1882) Likewise, Kuyper in the appendix to this work defended the doctrine of divine simplicity as biblical, consistent with the Trinity, and a doctrine acknowledge by Christians throughout church history.

<sup>159</sup> It is worth noting that Bavinck is distinguishing himself from Anselm’s definition of God as “id quo maius cogitari nequit.”

<sup>160</sup> *RD* II, 176. Bavinck may have Aquinas in mind here with basic metaphysical terms that he references each being referenced in Question 3 of Aquinas *Summa Theologica*. However, we may also suggest that Bavinck simply inherited this terminology from Reformed Orthodoxy see Rehnman, “The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy,” 377-378,

immutable, perfect, independent, etc. Bavinck argues that the failure to uphold divine simplicity would lead to dualism, in which God's attributes are outside of him.

Bavinck then models his eclectic method as he resources Augustine and Richard St. Victor for his own purposes.<sup>161</sup> In book V section 10 of his *The Trinity* Augustine argues that God does not participate in his greatness, as if greatness is something outside of God, but God is his greatness. He states, "God is not great by participating in greatness, but he is great with his great self because he is his own greatness."<sup>162</sup> Augustine likewise expresses this can be applied to all of God's attributes. Additionally in book VI section 1, Augustine reasons that the Son is co-eternal and equal to the Father and thus attributes belong rightly to them both, and we may add the Spirit likewise. Similarly the section of Richard St. Victor that Bavinck cites reasons that God himself must be the source of everything that he is. Bavinck uses these two theologians to support his assertion that God must be simple. In particular to showcase that the lack of simplicity would implicate dualism in God.

To draw out the truth that God is distinct and different from his creation he brings up the Creator creature distinction. God is being, where as creatures participate in being. God is his existence while creatures participate in existence. God is infinite, and all that is in him is infinite, creatures however are finite and all that is in them is finite. "All his attributes are divine, hence infinite and one with his being." All creatures are compound; God is simple. God is infinite, "all-sufficient, fully-blessed and glorious within himself."<sup>163</sup> In this short section, Bavinck cites French Jesuit theologian Dionysius Petavius whose work *De Theologicis Dogmatibus* traced the development of doctrines chronologically.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Bavinck mistakenly cites Hugo St. Victor rather than Richard St. Victor. Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity*, trans. Ruben Angelici (Cambridge, UK: James Clark & Co., 2011), Book I, XII.

<sup>162</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, V, 2.

<sup>163</sup> RD II, 176.

<sup>164</sup> Dionysius Petavius, *De Theologicis Dogmatibus* Vol. II (Paris: Vives, 1865-1867), chpt. 2.

In this section of *Theologicis Dogmatibus*, Petavius argues that simplicity may be deduced from God's excellence, eternity, aseity, and that he is boundless and infinite.<sup>165</sup> Petavius argument stretches nine pages as he catalogs the historic development of the doctrine. Most notably, for Bavinck's purpose Petavius asserts in line with the tradition that all that is created is compounded, and divisible but there is no composition in God, for God is supremely simple and indivisible.<sup>166</sup> Bavinck asserts that what he has argued so far is sufficient to answer the critique of *DDS* as a metaphysical abstraction.

By abstractions Bavinck means the process of "eliminating all the contrasts and distinctions that characterize creatures and describing him [God] as the being who transcends all such contrasts."<sup>167</sup> This Bavinck tells us is what modern philosophers have called the "Absolute" and what philosophers of old called "substance." These terms figures such as Xenophanes, Plato, Philo, Spinoza, and Hegel applied to God. Alternatively, simplicity for Bavinck is not abstract. Rather *DDS* is "the end result of ascribing to God all the perfections of creatures to the ultimate divine degree."<sup>168</sup> The difference here is subtle, but important. Bavinck is asserting that simplicity, rather than being purely apophatic, is indeed a cataphatic doctrine. In other words, rather than divine simplicity being considered strictly another doctrine of what God is not, it is also a positive description of the fullness of God's being, an "unbounded ocean of being."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Petavius, *De Theologicis Dogmatibus*, II, 185.

<sup>166</sup> Petavius, *De Theologicis Dogmatibus*, II, 193.

<sup>167</sup> *RD* II, 176.

<sup>168</sup> *RD* II, 176.

<sup>169</sup> *RD* II, 176.

Bavinck contrasts his viewpoint of the Absolute against Ferdinand C. Baur, a disciple of Hegel. Baur asserts, that divine simplicity leads to pantheism.<sup>170</sup> Bavinck avers, that *DDS* is fundamentally opposed to pantheism. For in pantheism, God has no existence apart from the world.<sup>171</sup> In other words, simplicity rather than leading to pantheism defends the doctrine of God from that very critique. Bavinck make this point elaborating on his interpretation of Hegel, Bavinck states:

In the thought of Hegel . . . the Absolute, pure Being, Thought, Idea, does not exist before the creation of the world, but is only logically and potentially prior to the world. All the qualifications of the Absolute are devoid of content—nothing but abstract logical categories.<sup>172</sup>

Bavinck cites German theologian Arthur Drews work *Die deutsche Spekulation seit Kant* in aid of his interpretation of Hegel.<sup>173</sup> Drew's chapter "Radical Atheism" engages Ludwig Feuerbach's critique of Hegel's Absolute. "God," Hegel said, "is only in thought and thought." Feuerbach however, views thinking only as something humans do, and therefore quickly arrives at the conclusion that the Absolute must be nothing more than a product of human thought. This resulted in Feuerbach perceiving the highest essence of the theology of

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<sup>170</sup> F.C. Baur, *Die christliche lehre von der Dreieinigkeit und menschenwerdung Gottes in ihrer geschichtlichen entwicklung*, Vol. II (Tubingen: C.F. Oslander, 1842), 634-635 fn.58 Baur asserts that the pantheistic element in Thomas system is his divine simplicity.

<sup>171</sup> *RD* III, 588. Bavinck critiquing pantheism elsewhere, as it relates to simplicity states: It is even a question whether religious experience in fact proves or demands the unity of God. For it does not need an absolute power or a being with absolute metaphysical attributes, such as independence, simplicity, personality, and so on. All such attributes are empty titles, stones in place of bread; they offer "a metaphysical monster to our worship." Religion only needs a higher power. There is perhaps an important truth inherent in polytheism. The infinite diversity of the world comes more into its own in a polytheistic worldview.

<sup>172</sup> Bavinck critiques Hegel's Absolute as pantheistic throughout his *RD* II, 49, 115, 155-156, 166, 176-177, 185-187, 193, 185-187, 193-196, 411, 413, 516, 613; *RD* III, 275, 568-569; He also critiques it as such in his *Philosophy of Revelation*: 15-16, 42-43, 75-77. Georg Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (University of California Press, 1985), 97. Hegel would deny being a pantheist in his first volume of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, "It has never occurred to any man to say, all is God, that is things in their individuality or contingency - much less has it been maintained in Philosophy." Bavinck seems aware that it was not exactly pantheism. "Hegel, too, openly acknowledged his adherence to pantheism, not in the pantheism that regards finite things themselves as God but in the pantheism that in the finite and accidental sees the appearance of the absolute, the fossilized idea, frozen intelligence" (*RD* II, 411). Bavinck's critique remains.

<sup>173</sup> Arthur Drews, *Die deutsche Spekulation seit Kant mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das Wesen des Absoluten und die Persönlichkeit Gottes* (Berlin: Paul Maeter, 1893), I, 249.

his time – the Absolute, as nonsense and nothing more than an abstraction.<sup>174</sup> It is this same critique that Bavinck picks-up and utilizes to critique Hegel's Absolute as an abstraction.

Bavinck argues that all qualifiers are removed in the Absolute, nothing is left but “pure being,” but this “being” is merely an abstraction, for the Absolute becomes a concept “for which there is no corresponding reality and which may not be further defined. Every further qualification would finitize it, make it into something particular, and hence destroy its generality.”<sup>175</sup> Hence, Hegel's phrase “All determination is negation” which Bavinck references.<sup>176</sup>

This phrase of Hegel's he claims to have picked up from Spinoza.<sup>177</sup> The principle emerges as part of Hegel's dialectical movement from pure being, to nothing, to becoming, to determinate being. What is involved in making this path from pure being to determinate being is the process of negation. Rather than assert that God is the being who transcends all description Bavinck asserts that God is a unique being who remains determined, but not in the manner that Hegel suggests. Bavinck cycles this through the classical thinkers he had engaged earlier in his simplicity section. Eunomius who suggests semantic diversity in God

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<sup>174</sup> Drews, *Die deutsche Spekulation seit Kant*, 238-255. In this section, Drew demonstrates Feuerbach's shift away from Hegel's Absolute into his critique of it. Marx Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 356-357. Wartofsky agrees with this reading of Feuerbach stating, “But if the Absolute or the *Idea* in itself which speculative philosophy posits as an essence beyond actual or concrete thinking, is not simply the objectification of thought, what is it? Feuerbach sees in this conception of hypostatization of a particular capacity of thought, namely, the capacity for *abstraction*. The Absolute is therefore the projected or mystified form in which *abstraction* is posited as an object for thought. The Absolute, as infinite, unconditioned, necessary *Being* is therefore nothing but the objectification of the infinity, the unconditionedness, the necessity, the absoluteness of abstract thought, posited as thought's own object, and as an object that is beyond thought itself.”

<sup>175</sup> RD II, 177.

<sup>176</sup> “Omnis determinatio est negatio”

<sup>177</sup> Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London, UK: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 536.

“Determinateness is negation – is the absolute principle of Spinoza's philosophy.” There has been some discussion on whether or not Hegel understood Spinoza's use of it well, See: Robert Stern, “‘Determination is Negation’: The Adventures of a Doctrine from Spinoza to Hegel to the British Idealists.” *Hegel Bulletin*, 37 (2016): 29-52.

would imply ontological diversity.<sup>178</sup> Bavinck rejects this suggestion and argues simplicity not only entails a variety of names for God, but demands it. In this way, the attributes ascribed to God do not denote different realities within God; rather each attribute designates the manifold being of God under a particular aspect:

God is so abundantly rich that we can gain some idea of his richness only by the availability of many names. Every name refers to the same full divine being, but each time from a particular angle, the angle from which it reveals itself to us in his works. God is therefore *simple in his multiplicity and manifold in his simplicity* (Augustine).<sup>179</sup>

Bavinck adopts Augustine's divine simplicity mantra and makes it his own to push against Hegel's Absolute. This becomes clearer in the sentence that follows. In which, Bavinck states, "Hence every qualification, every name, used with reference to God, so far from being a negation, is an enrichment of our knowledge of his being."<sup>180</sup> In other words, while Hegel's Absolute is an abstraction free from all qualification, Bavinck's God has named himself and is thus a self-determined being. Thus to talk of God and his multiplicity of attributes or variety of names is not to reduce God, but rather to peer into the inexhaustible fullness of God's being.

In only the second place that Bavinck references Aquinas in his *DDS* he pulls from Aquinas defense of God as a self-determined being. In this section of Aquinas commentary on Lombard's *Sentences*, the objections revolve around determinations in God. Aquinas argues that God is self-determined being for no "additions can be made to" him and therefore neither "the diversity of relations of God himself to creatures" nor the "personal names" establish any sort of composition in God.<sup>181</sup> For Aquinas, God remains then a

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<sup>178</sup>Radde-Galwitz, *The Transformation of Divine Simplicity*, 112.

<sup>179</sup> *RD* II, 177. Italics mine.

<sup>180</sup> *RD* II, 177.

<sup>181</sup> Aquinas, "Concerning God's Simplicity," trans. John Laumakis of 'The Aquinas Translation Project' *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, accessed March 3, 2018, <http://hosted.desales.edu/w4/philtheo/loughlin/ATP/Sententiae/ISentd8q4a1.html>

determined being, in that he avoids the addition of any parts as an independent, perfect, and eternal being.

In the same footnote Bavinck cites Catholic thinker Joseph Kleutgen's work *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*.<sup>182</sup> This section of Kleutgen's work engages pantheism in relation to divine simplicity. Most interestingly though, Kleutgen quotes the same section of Aquinas that Bavinck references while also going beyond it referring to the thoughts of Francisco Suarez. Suarez suggests there are two ways to view "pure being" the first is to remove all characteristics and be left with the likes of Hegel's Absolute, which he too determines is a pure abstraction, and not truly God. Alternatively, we may think of God as a peculiar and special being not with the absence of qualifications, but with the fullness of being.<sup>183</sup> In this manner, we have an Absolute being that is opposed to that of pantheism. An absolute, that "is the fullness of being, not an abstraction, but concrete, not universal, but peculiar, not mingled with others, but independent from everything, existing in itself."<sup>184</sup> Thus in composing his defense simplicity from the modern charge of abstraction Bavinck theologically resources Aquinas, Augustine, Kleutgen, and Feuerbach. Bavinck's conceptualization of the Absolute has much in common with Kleutgen's articulation, but one should hear the chords of each one of his sources being struck.

In the final few sentences, Bavinck defends simplicity against the second critique that of it being inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity. Bavinck states, first that simplicity is not inconsistent with "twofold" or "threefold" but rather the antonym of "composite."<sup>185</sup> In other words, there is richness to simplicity that does not conflict with the diversity of

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<sup>182</sup> Joseph Kleutgen, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*. 2nd ed, (Münster: Theissing, 1867), I, 204. See Brock, "Herman Bavinck and Neo-Thomism" for a fine reading of Bavinck's engagement with Kleutgen.

<sup>183</sup> Kleutgen, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*, 207-208.

<sup>184</sup> Kleutgen, *Die Theologie der Vorzeit*, 208: German (translation mine) – "Es ist die Fülle des Seins, aber kein abstractes, sondern ein concretes, kein allgemeines, sondern ein eigenthümliches, kein mit andern vermisches, sondern von allem ausgeschiedenes, in sich allein bestehendes Wesen."

<sup>185</sup> RD II, 177.

persons. The divine essence then is not composed of three persons, nor as Bavinck argues, is each person of the Trinity composed of the personal properties of the persons. Rather, the same simple being exists in three persons. Bavinck writes:

Now the Divine being is not composed of three persons, nor is every person composed of the being and the *personalis proprietas* (personal property); but the same simple being exists in the three persons, every person or personal property is not a distinction *re* (in the matter of) the essence but according to *ratione* (reason); every personal property is certainly a *relatio realis* (real relation) but does not add *aliquid reale* (anything real) to the *essentia* (essence). The personal properties *non componunt sed solum distinguunt* (do not compose but only distinguish) [the divine essence].<sup>186</sup>

The use of *personalis proprietas* is a reference to the personal relations between the persons of the Trinity – of the Father (*paternity*), Son (*filiation*) and Spirit (*procession*).<sup>187</sup> In other words, the property of filiation belongs properly to the Son, but not to the Father. Although the property does have mutual implications on the Father, namely that he is not the Son. These personal properties identify real relations in God, but do not add anything of substance to the essence. In this manner, the personal properties individuate or distinguish the persons, but do not create a compound in God. Through suggesting that there is a difference between essence and personal properties, and between properties themselves Bavinck defends *DDS* from the charge that it is inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity.

In this short section, which is peppered with scholastic terminology, Bavinck pulls from two more thinkers. The first Petavius who Bavinck appealed to earlier in his *DDS*, and the second Jerome Zanchius.<sup>188</sup> In this section of Petavius work he defends distinguishing the persons through their relations or personal properties. Likewise, Zanchius argues that

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<sup>186</sup> *RD* II, 177. Dutch (translation mine) - En nu is het Goddelijk wezen niet samengesteld uit drie personen, noch ook iedere persoon samengesteld uit het wezen en de *proprietates personales*; maar het eene zelfde eenvoudige wezen bestaat in de drie personen, iedere persoon of personeele eigenschap is van het wezen niet *re* maar allen *ratio realis* maar voegt toch niet *aliquid reale* aan de *essentia* toe. De personeele eigenschappen *non componunt sed solum distinguunt*.

<sup>187</sup> Muller, *Dictionary of Latin*, 296.

<sup>188</sup> Petavius, *De Theologicis Dogmatibus*, II, chpts.3-4. Jerome Zanchius, *Omnium operum theologicorum*. Vol. II (Geneva: Samuelis Crispini, 1649), 67-69.



simplicity is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity. First, he asserts that the incarnation does not conflict because it adds nothing new to the essence. Second he argues the personal relations of the Trinity are compatible with simplicity, for they do not create a composition of essence, but rather a distinction of persons: “God is the essence and the real relations.” Zanchius supports this with the scholastic distinction that Bavinck pulls from above, that the relations of the persons are real relations, but they do not add anything real to the essence.<sup>189</sup>

Thus ends Bavinck’s articulation of simplicity under the section incommunicable attributes. In the fifth chapter, we will look at where Bavinck’s *DDS* fits among the other divine attributes as well as articulate discontinuities and continuities between Bavinck and his sources. Elsewhere, in his *RD* Bavinck mentions *DDS* when articulating the divine essence. He states, “God is absolute unity and simplicity, without composition or division; and that unity itself is not ethical or contractual in nature, as it is among humans, but absolute; nor is it accidental, but it is essential to the divine being.”<sup>190</sup> The very next sentence Bavinck states:

The glory of the confession of the Trinity consists above all in the fact that that unity, however absolute, does not exclude but includes diversity. God’s being is not an abstract unity or concept, but a fullness of being, an infinite abundance of life, whose diversity, so far from diminishing the unity, unfolds it to its fullest extent.<sup>191</sup>

In these two quotes and the balance of the chapter the foundational role that the *DDS* constitutes for Bavinck was revealed. We may assert that *DDS* for Bavinck is not a metaphysical abstraction, but is rooted in the self-determined revelation of God.

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<sup>189</sup> Zanchius, *Omnium operum theologiarum*, 69: “At Deo est essentia, & relationes reales.” Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 199. “Zanchi would carefully define an attribute as ‘something that we attribute to God on our part’ rather than as an incidental or separable property of the divine nature. Zanchi’s discussion set the stage for subsequent Reformed scholastic analysis of the problem of the attributes with its clear declaration that there are no accidents or natural passions in God, and that there is no diversity or division in the divine essence. God has simply chosen to accommodate his revelation in the Scriptures to our way of knowing, revealing there a series of attributes that are applied to him by created order.”

<sup>190</sup> *RD* II, 300.

<sup>191</sup> *RD* II, 300; *GD* II, 307 (Dutch) – “Maar nu ligt de heerlijkheid van de belijdenis der triniteit juist hierin, dat die eenheid, hoe absoluut ook, verscheidenheid niet uit-maar insluit. Het wezen Gods is geen abstracte eenheid, geen afgetrokken begrip, maar een volheid van zijn, een oneindige rijkdom van leven, die in de verscheidenheid juist de hoogste eenheid ontvouwt.” *ORF*, 144. Bavinck articulates the same point.

Furthermore, this doctrine does not contradict the Trinity, but rather facilitates the manifold diversity of God. This diversity does not destroy the unity of essence, but rather allows us to articulate the fullness of God's infinite being. God is absolutely simple. This simplicity does not diminish God's diversity, but rather facilitates it.

This chapter aided the thesis in identifying the eclectic nature of Bavinck's reformed catholicity executed in his *DDS*. It also makes clear that Bavinck's *DDS* should not be strictly identified with Aquinas. We may assert that because Bavinck is critical of Occam and Scotus, but not of Aquinas that he is implicitly Thomistic. However, Aquinas' simplicity is strictly apophatic and Bavinck's articulation of a cataphatic doctrine differentiates himself from Thomas. Moreover, Bavinck pulls from a number of different sources including modern, Reformed, and Catholic sources. In what ways is Bavinck attempting to be modern in his *DDS*? Through his engagement with modern philosophers and theologians Bavinck seeks to construct the doctrine in such a way to meet the traditional critiques of the doctrine. Moreover, his critical appropriation of a modified Absolute, re-defined through his confessional heritage brings Bavinck's simplicity into modernity.

Furthermore it also supports Eglinton's archetypal/ectypal unity-in-diversity hypothesis. Bavinck's articulation of the superlative unity-in-diversity of God in the cataphatic "unbounded ocean" of God's essence subsumed under the *DDS* offers support to the organic motif. The diversity or multiplicity of the created order reflects the diverse attributes of the archetypal Triune God. Moreover, the unity of the of the created order can find its archetypal parallel in the *DDS*.

## CHAPTER V: THE STRUCTURE OF BAVINCK'S DOCTRINE OF GOD

In chapter five, we explore the structure of Bavinck's divine attributes. The goal of this chapter is to provide the theological framework, in which his *DDS* is situated. The chapter proceeds forward in two stages. First, the reader is given a cursory tour of the broader framework of Bavinck's *RD* to highlight the overarching Trinitarian theme of unity-in-diversity. Second, we burrow into volume II of *Reformed Dogmatics*, in which Bavinck explicates his *DDS*. Here we will identify in Bavinck's structure that he begins with the diversity of God before turning towards the unity of God. This section will give a brief introduction to Bavinck's articulation of the divine names and the divine attributes. The fifth chapter will conclude drawing out points of continuity and discontinuity with the Reformed Scholastics, and Aquinas in Bavinck's structure and his articulation of *DDS* from the previous chapter. Observing Bavinck's structure will aid us in understanding the place of simplicity in Bavinck's theology and help us to understand Bavinck's modest uniqueness.

### I. Trinitarian Structure of *Reformed Dogmatics*

The larger structure of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* is focused on the unfolding of the knowledge of the God who is triune, who has made himself known in the unities-in-diversities of the created order, the organism of scripture, and the person of Jesus Christ. The first volume introduces us to the "lost art of systematic Reformed theology" and "establishes a methodology by which one knows God as triune."<sup>192</sup> The third volume details the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity's "accomplishment of redemption"<sup>193</sup> and exalts the one who is

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<sup>192</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 26, 89-93; Eglinton, "Some Benefits of Going Organic: Herman Bavinck's theology of the visible church," *Theology in Scotland* 27, no. 1 (2010): 23-36, 26. Eglinton also notes the influence of the Apostles Creed on the shape of *Reformed Dogmatics*.

<sup>193</sup> Eglinton, "Some Benefits of Going Organic," 26.

“the eternal mediator” of salvation and knowledge of God.<sup>194</sup> Bavinck writes of Christ, “He not only spoke the truth but is himself the truth who has made known the Father, leads us to the Father, and, in the knowledge of God, grants eternal life.”<sup>195</sup> The final volume, expounds the *ad extra* work appropriated to the Spirit in the life of the church. The second volume, of which simplicity and the remainder of the divine attributes are situated, draws attention to the Triune God *ad intra* and additionally the *ad extra* work typically appropriated to the Father of creation and providence.<sup>196</sup>

The first volume sets the stage, then for the central dogma of Bavinck’s theology that of the “knowledge of God.” This comprehensive dogma interweaves all aspects of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, with the Father, Son, and Spirit, revealed historically before humanity in the created order, scripture, the incarnation, and then proclaimed to all of humanity through the church. Through the doctrine of the knowledge of God Bavinck’s organic motif penetrates the center of his dogmatics and the cosmos as an ectypal unity-in-diversity reveals the archetypal unity-in-diversity of the Triune God.

Bruce Pass in his article, “The Question of the Central Dogma in Herman Bavinck” argues that at the time of writing the *Reformed Dogmatics* the knowledge of God functioned as the starting point and center of his theological system, with Christ as the mid-point. Pass contends Bavinck trended towards Christology as the starting and center of dogmatics later in life although he never re-organized his *Reformed Dogmatics* or explored this fully in later theological writings.<sup>197</sup> With the knowledge of God central to the dogmatic task for Bavinck, he writes, “The imperative task of the dogmatician is to think God’s thoughts after him and

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<sup>194</sup> RD III, 215.

<sup>195</sup> RD III, 475.

<sup>196</sup> RD II, 318-319. Bavinck upholds the catholic position of inseparable operations and is Augustinian in the way he considers appropriation.

<sup>197</sup> Pass, “Questions of the Central Dogma in Herman Bavinck,” 28.

to trace their unity. His work is not finished until he has mentally absorbed this unity and set it forth in a dogmatics.”<sup>198</sup> In other words, the conceptual task of the theologian is to know God and to trace all things back to him, in particular identifying their unity in God.

It is precisely this reason we must grasp Bavinck’s *DDS*. “The foundation of both diversity and unity is *in God* . . . here is a unity that does not destroy but rather maintains diversity, and a diversity that does not come at the expense of unity, but rather unfolds it in its riches.”<sup>199</sup> Bavinck articulates the theological weight he places on both unity, which facilitates and promotes pluriformity and diversity, which fosters and enriches unity. The task of the theologian then rests on their understanding of the superlative unity-in-diversity of God and this suggests a close reading of the doctrine of simplicity.

This cursory introduction to the main theme of *Reformed Dogmatics* “knowledge of God” and the broader pervasive Trinitarian structure, and revelatory organic unities-in-diversities, provide for us the foundation to penetrate the structure of volume II. This next section is therefore less argumentative and more descriptive. As we explore the structure Bavinck’s doctrine of God dipping into the substance of each section which will aid us in our understanding of the previous chapter.

## **II. *God and Creation***

The English version of Volume II, *God and Creation*, is split into six major parts. Although, in the 1908 Dutch version it is split into only two sections: “Concerning God” and “The World in its Original State.”<sup>200</sup> Part I and II of *God and Creation* constitute the first section in the original Dutch “Concerning God.” In these two sections, Bavinck introduces us to his doctrine of God, and lays the foundation of unity-in-diversity that pervades the rest of his

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<sup>198</sup> *RD* I, 44.

<sup>199</sup> *RD* II, 437.

<sup>200</sup> Dutch – “Hoofdstuk IV. Over God, Hoofdstuk V. Over De Wereld in haar Oorspronkelijken Staat.”

theology. The first, teaches that God though he is incomprehensible can be known. The second, answers the Reformed scholastic question of “*Quid sit?*”<sup>201</sup>

Dolf Te Velde in his *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy* lists five elements, the sequence of which may vary, that are characteristic of almost all *Early*, *High*, and *Late* Reformed orthodox treatments of the doctrine of God: 1) the names of God, 2) the being of God, 3) God’s attributes, 4) God’s works, and, 5) the Persons of God.<sup>202</sup> In 1908, Bavinck follows this pattern closely, proceeding in this manner: 1) Knowledge of God, 2) the names of God, 3) the being of God, 4) the attributes of God, 5) the Persons of God, and 6) God’s Works.<sup>203</sup> However, there is a difference in structure between Bavinck’s 1908 and the 1897, which is structured as follows: 1) The Knowledge of God, 2) The names of God, 3) The being of God, 4) The Divine Counsel.<sup>204</sup>

In the first edition in 1897, Bavinck does not use incommunicable and communicable attributes as a framework to structure his work.<sup>205</sup> Alternatively, he proceeds strictly through the names of God. However, by 1908 Bavinck does utilize the communicable incommunicable distinction to structure his section on the divine attributes, revealing a shift in emphasis. Eglinton also makes note of this and argues this should stress the importance of the names of God for Bavinck. In particular, Eglinton suggests it highlights divine diversity.<sup>206</sup> In this manner, the names of God, which are revelatory of

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<sup>201</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 104. “Who/what is God?”

<sup>202</sup> Dolf te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School: A Study in Method and Content* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 111. Te Velde follows the categories (Early, High, and Late) suggested by Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. I. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 40-52.

<sup>203</sup> In Bavinck’s *Our Reasonable Faith* he follows a different pattern: 1) The being of God, 2) The attributes of God, 3) The names of God, 4) The Persons of God, 5) God’s works.

<sup>204</sup> See Table 1: Differences in the Structure of Herman Bavinck’s Doctrine of God. The numbers (20, 21, 22) reflect the chapter divisions in the respective works.

<sup>205</sup> Bavinck does note the idea of incommunicable and communicable attributes in 1897, but it does not structure his Doctrine of God (66, 98, 99, 118). The concept for him at this point simply identifies a way of talking about knowledge of God - apophatic (incommunicable attributes) and cataphatic (communicable attributes) distinction.

<sup>206</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 104-105.

God's divine self-disclosure, play a fundamental role in establishing God's attributes and character.<sup>207</sup>

In 1897, Bavinck may have decided to describe God strictly through the divine names as a way of emphasizing the revelatory nature of God, rather than split God into "two halves." The shift toward structuring his doctrine of God with the incommunicable and communicable attributes however, should not suggest that the divine attributes do not appear in the earlier edition. Rather, the shift towards incommunicable and communicable attributes, which Bavinck deploys in 1908, seems to be because of its conceptual helpfulness.<sup>208</sup>

Other structural differences can quickly be noticed by referring to Table 2. Most notable is the absence of a "Trinity" section in 1897. However, one should consider this as having continuity with the typical structure of reformed scholasticism and see Bavinck's inclusion of a "Trinity" section in 1908 as more enlightening to the direction of his theology.<sup>209</sup> This is not to suggest that discussion on the Trinity was absent from 1897, rather simply to point out Bavinck gave the loci its own section in later editions. A key thing to remember as we transition into a description of the main parts of *God and Creation* is that

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<sup>207</sup> RD II, 133. In 1908, which perhaps explains his decision to structure the attributes differently earlier, he says: "All the above divisions seem to be very different and called by very different names. But materially they are not that far apart. Whether people speak of negative and positive, incommunicable and communicable, quiescent and operative, absolute and relative, metaphysical and psychological attributes, of attributes of substance and subject apart from or in relation to the universe and humankind, actually they consistently refer to the same order in which the attributes are treated. Against all the above arrangements one can lodge virtually the same objections. They all appear to divide God's being into two halves. They all seem to treat first God's absoluteness, then his personality; first God's being as such, then God in relation to his creatures. They all seem to imply that the first group of terms is obtained apart from the creation, and the second from God's creatures, and that consequently, there is no unity or harmony among God's perfections." Alternatively, or perhaps together with the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, which Bavinck was the editor (1881) of utilizes incommunicable and communicable as a distinction.

<sup>208</sup> RD II, 136-137. Bavinck seems to indicate that he is in favor of utilizing it now as the best conceptual tool to safeguard against pantheism and deism. In addition, he seems to find it conceptually helpful in his anthropology.

<sup>209</sup> Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 39: "Bavinck's ordering reflects the pedagogical presentation of the 'tradition' on the Triune God, which begins with the divine attributes as shared in common by the three persons, along with the ordering according to the redemptive-historical development."

Bavinck's theological writing is not a repristination of classical orthodoxy, but rather should be seen as reappropriation of it in his own modern context.

Table 2: A Comparison of The Structure of Herman Bavinck's Doctrine of God	
Structure of Doctrine of God (1897)	Structure of Doctrine of God (1908)
20. The Incomprehensibility of God 21. The Knowledge of God ( <i>cognitio Dei insita</i> ) 22. The Knowledge of God ( <i>cognitio Dei acquisita</i> ) 23. The names of God 24. The Classifications of the names of God 25. The Proper names of God 26. The names of the being of God a. God as the Being b. God as Spirit c. God as light d. God as the Holy One e. God as Sovereign 27. The personal names of God 28. The Divine Council of God	23. The incomprehensibility of God 24. The Knowledge of God ( <i>cognitio Dei insita</i> ) 25. The Knowledge of God ( <i>cognitio Dei acquisita</i> ) 26. The names of God 27. The classification of the names of God 28. The proper names of God 29. The incommunicable attributes 30. The communicable attributes a. God's spiritual nature b. Intellectual attributes c. Moral attributes d. Attributes of Sovereignty e. Perfection, beatitude, and glory 31. The Holy Trinity 32. The Divine Counsel

### *Knowledge of God*

It should come as no surprise that Bavinck begins his doctrine of God with the knowledge of God, since it is the central dogma in his system. "All the doctrines treated in dogmatics – whether they concern the universe, humanity, Christ, and so forth – are but the explication of the one central dogma of the knowledge of God."<sup>210</sup> In this section, there are a number of concepts and themes that Bavinck introduces, which he wants the reader to view his doctrine of God as appropriating or critiquing. Bavinck's two main theological combatants are pantheism and deism. The main theological concept that he is looking to balance is God's transcendence and God's immanence. Lastly, in this section he picks up the age old theological interplay between apophatic and cataphatic knowledge.

<sup>210</sup> RD II, 29.



Bavinck begins his section on the knowledge of God posing the question: How can we know God? This interweaves with his discussion on apophatic and cataphatic knowledge. He engages a multiplicity of thinkers to show how the incomprehensibility of God always had a significant place in the theology of the church. The historical progression of Bavinck's argument leads us to modernity and identification of the antithesis between the absoluteness of God and personality of God, which Bavinck writes, "was always felt and expressed in the negative and positive (apophatic and cataphatic) theology. Bavinck redefines "Absoluteness" then to be the orthodox view of the transcendence and incomprehensibility of God.<sup>211</sup> On the flip side, "personality" is defined as God's self-consciousness.<sup>212</sup> What Bavinck wants us to notice is that scripture places the personality of God and the Absoluteness of God hand in hand while all other religious and philosophical systems sacrifice one for the other.<sup>213</sup>

Bavinck suggests that the antithesis of absolute and personality is the difference between emphasizing the poles in apophatic and cataphatic theology. In other words, if we make a positive predication of God (cataphatic) we bring him down to our level, however, if we simply say what God is not (apophatic) we say nothing of God himself.<sup>214</sup> "Absoluteness and personality, infinity and causality, immutability and communicability, absolute transcendence and likeness to the creature - all these pairs seem irreconcilable in the concept of God. We are caught up in an insoluble antinomy."<sup>215</sup> Bavinck returns to scripture, to

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<sup>211</sup> RD II, 49: "As long as absoluteness is not equated with boundlessness, with infinite extension in all directions, it is hard to see how personality would be incompatible with it. Rightly considered, all it means (personality) is that God's self-consciousness equally deep and rich, equally infinite, as his being."

<sup>212</sup> RD II, 34. Sutanto, "Organic Knowing," 45. Sutanto notes the modest uniqueness of Bavinck's God as "absolute personality."

<sup>213</sup> Pairing these two together as "Absolute Personality" was perhaps pulled from Isaak Dorner, when Bavinck brings up the union of these two ideas in RD II, 45 he cites Dorner. Dorner defines God as "Absolute Personality" although he also subsumes "organism" under God as well so while Bavinck may have pulled from Dorner, he is certainly not embracing all of Dorner's construction and is using the phrase then for his own purposes.

<sup>214</sup> RD II, 46-47.

<sup>215</sup> RD II, 47, 117: "We always especially face the problem of doing equal justice to the absoluteness and the personality of God, the incommunicable and the communicable attributes, God's absolute superiority over, and

assert that we must emphatically affirm the “unsearchable majesty” and that we have no knowledge of God as God has of himself.<sup>216</sup> The interplay between apophatic and cataphatic results in what Bavinck calls analogical knowledge of this God who is Absolute-personality:

This knowledge may be called positive insofar as by it we recognize a being infinite and distinct from all finite creatures. On the other hand, it is negative because we cannot ascribe a single predicate to God as we conceive that predicate in relation to creatures. It is therefore an *analogical* knowledge: a knowledge of a being who is unknowable in himself, yet able to make something of himself known in the being he created.<sup>217</sup>

Bavinck closes his section on the incomprehensibility of God with a positive note that we can know something of God. For all knowledge rests on these three things: (1) all knowledge is grounded in him, (2) all knowledge exists solely through him, and (3) all knowledge has its object and content in God.<sup>218</sup> All knowledge rests then on the self-communication of God to his creatures. In other words, Christians depend on the self-disclosure of God in creation, the incarnation, and scripture to know, love, and enjoy him.

### *The names of God*

In the next section Bavinck enters into a discussion on divine names, he states, “All we can learn about God from his revelation is designated his name in scripture.”<sup>219</sup> As Eglinton notes, Bavinck attaches a certain etymological significance to the idea of name: “Bavinck

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his communion with the world.” Bavinck utilizes “absolute” and not *volstrekte*” throughout this section for God.

<sup>216</sup> Bruce Pass, “Revelation and Reason in Herman Bavinck,” *Westminster Theological Journal* (Forthcoming 2018): 1-26. In this article, Pass explores the place of mystery in the epistemology and theology of Bavinck. Pass’ persuasively argues that mystery lays at the heart of the relation between revelation and reason. Pass gives four utilizations of mystery by Bavinck 1) The New Testament usage of once hidden but now revealed, 2) Matters that remain presently unknown, 3) Mystery that can only be ‘known’ by faith (Trinity, etc.) - importantly Pass links this utilization of mystery with Bavinck’s Creator-creature divide. This is the mystery Bavinck utilizes above it is one that can only be confessed and believed. (15-19) Pass further shows the mystery functions as a limiting and doxological role in which, in other words mystery reminds us of our finiteness which is proper to creatures, and therefore becomes the “well-spring” for worship (21-26). Pass also affirms in this article that Bavinck far from being an apophatic theologian his “high view of revelation guarantees a constructive theology,” 15.

<sup>217</sup> RD II, 48.

<sup>218</sup> RD II, 49.

<sup>219</sup> RD II, 97.

regards “name” in the Biblical languages (ὄνομα etc.) as rooted in the concepts of ‘sign’ and ‘distinguishing mark’. A name, in the true sense, is no mere arbitrary tag. For Bavinck, a name is closely bound to the character of its bearer.”<sup>220</sup> True identity then is disclosed in the giving of a name. His utilization of the names of God is innovative compared to medieval theology, but in line with much of reformed scholasticism, following the pattern of discussing the “name” of something before discussing the “thing” itself.<sup>221</sup>

The beginning of the doctrine of God then begins with God’s self-disclosure of himself to his people, in particular how God “names” himself. Immediately Bavinck initiates his fundamental theme of unity-in-diversity, in particular Bavinck highlights the unity-in-diversity of the divine names.<sup>222</sup> “The *one* name of God, which is inclusive of his entire revelation both in nature and in grace, is divisible for us in a great many names. Only in that way do we obtain a full view of the riches of his revelation and the profound meaning of his name.”<sup>223</sup>

In making himself known to his creatures through the divine names the infinite condescends to be known by finite creatures; he accommodates to our creatureliness. “A crucial axiom, then, in reading Bavinck is that he regards all revelation as anthropomorphic. Every moment of each act of God’s self-revelation accommodates human finitude.”<sup>224</sup> Our knowledge of God is drawn from his Word, in creaturely language, as he makes himself known. “God’s self-consciousness is archetypal; our knowledge of God, drawn from his

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<sup>220</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 105.

<sup>221</sup> Te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*, 114-115.

<sup>222</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 106. Eglinton draws attention to this as well. “The knowledge of God thus begins with the many, rather than the one. Divine self-revelation, encapsulated in the name by which God makes himself known, is multifaceted because God is internally diverse.”

<sup>223</sup> RD II, 99. (Italics Bavinck)

<sup>224</sup> Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 106.

Word, is ectypal.”<sup>225</sup> Bavinck gives three reasons that theology must follow this archetypal/ectypal scheme: (1) All of creation reflects its creator, (2) humans occupy a unique position as divine image bearers - “we know God because we are known by him,” and (3) scripture continually puts before us God as absolute or transcendent.<sup>226</sup> He then segues into a discussion on classifying the names of God:

While Scripture calls God by many names, it never proceeds from an abstract concept of God, nor does it ever highlight one attribute of God at the expense of others. Granted, sometimes one and then another attributes comes to the fore, but perfect harmony exists among them all. (...) God in his revelation always unfolds all his perfections as a harmonious whole.<sup>227</sup>

Bavinck begins this discussion highlighting both the unity-in-diversity of divine names. He then returns once again to this idea of absolute personality. He argues all theologians either begin with the idea of the absolute or the idea of personality.<sup>228</sup> He reasons that balancing these two has been the continued struggle of theologians throughout the ages. Bavinck writes, “We always especially face the problem of doing equal justice to the absoluteness and personality of God, the incommunicable and the communicable attributes, God’s absolute superiority over, and his communion with the world.”<sup>229</sup> To balance these two Bavinck suggests it is the *DDS* we must pay attention to.

He states, “This doctrine of God’s simplicity was the means by which Christian theology was kept from the danger of splitting God’s attributes from his essence and of making them more or less independent from, and opposed to, his essence.”<sup>230</sup> Therefore in combating the perennial theological complexity of the transcendence and immanence of

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<sup>225</sup> *RD II*, 107. There is insufficient space in this thesis to defend the analogical, anthropomorphic nature of theological language. For an additional reformed take please see: Mark Jones, “God is Anthropomorphic,” in *God Is* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 201-210.

<sup>226</sup> *RD II*, 110-111.

<sup>227</sup> *RD II*, 110.

<sup>228</sup> *RD II*, 113.

<sup>229</sup> *RD II*, 117.

<sup>230</sup> *RD II*, 118.

God Bavinck turns to simplicity. It is here then, we are offered the solution or role that simplicity plays for Bavinck, that is that God is not one moment transcendent and the next personal, but rather God is a rich being who is absolute and personal, he is the God who is both unity and diversity. Harmony exists among the divine attributes; God is both immanent and transcendent.

Bavinck interestingly, continues his discourse on the Absolute again, however he follows this with a digression on *DDS*. Bavinck argues that we cannot make a distinction between God's essence and his attributes and that all perfections are his as the absolute. Bavinck then introduces *DDS* to promote an articulation of the diversity of the attributes; we may confess God as simple, yet we must also speak of distinct attributes as God reveals himself to his people by many names. Therefore we see how simplicity connects to the center of his theology in the knowledge of God. Bavinck's absolute simplicity argues for a God who reveals himself to his people as diverse in his simplicity, and manifold in his unity. However, God's diversity is also limited by his self-determination. This is not to say that God is finite, but rather God declares to his people in the divine names and attributes who he is and this shapes how we understand his manifold unity-in-diversity. Divine simplicity appears in the divine names section as a point of clarity. God has a multiplicity of names. Rather than this being a problem, Bavinck perceives this as a way in which we are able to know more of God:

This diversity of attributes, moreover, does not clash with God's simplicity. For that simplicity does not describe God as an abstract and general kind of being; on the contrary, it speaks of him as the absolute fullness of life. It is for this very reason that God reveals himself to finite creatures by many names. The divine essence is so infinitely and profusely rich that no creature can grasp it all at once.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> *RD* II, 423.

As he continues his discussion on the divine names he plays with the idea of apophatic and cataphatic knowledge. Bavinck affirms with the historic church, that God is both unknowable and knowable. As he turns towards classifying the attributes he identifies that all theology handles this division, just with different names:

Whether people speak of negative and positive, incommunicable and communicable, quiescent and operative, absolute and relative, metaphysical and psychological attributes, of attributes of the substance and subject apart from or in relation to the universe and humankind, actually they consistently refer to the same order in which the attributes are treated. Against all the above arrangements one can lodge virtually the same objections. They all appear to divide God's being into two halves. They all seem to treat first God's absoluteness, then his personality; first God's being as such, then God in relation to his creatures. They all seem to imply that the first group of terms is obtained apart from the creation, and the second from God's creatures, and that, consequently, there is no unity or concord among God's perfections.<sup>232</sup>

Having identified the problem, Bavinck recalls his anthropomorphic and analogical solution. God is the archetype of all ectypal knowledge. He is unknowable, yet makes himself known in his self-disclosure of himself.

Bavinck then turns directly to the proper personal names of God, first he begins discussing *El*, *Elohim*, and *El Shaddai*, suggesting they emphasize God's "absolute transcendence," "the fullness of life and power," yet also that he gives "himself to his people" and "comes down from his transcendence to the level of his creature."<sup>233</sup> This divine accommodation through the divine names speaks of a God who is infinite, but also allows himself to be known and experienced by the finite. Bavinck transitions then to *YHWH* which he describes as the "highest revelation of God" and as "God's real name."<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> RD II, 133. RD II, 128-129: "In the thinking of the church fathers God was both unknowable and knowable: unknowable in essence, yet knowable from revelation. On the one hand, they wrote, one can only say of God what he is *not*; on the other, in some defective and inadequate fashion, one can nevertheless predicate something *positive* about him."

<sup>233</sup> RD II, 139-140, 146: "The name *Elohim* denotes the God as Creator and Sustainer of all things; *El Shaddai* represents him as the mighty one who makes nature subservient to grace."

<sup>234</sup> RD II, 144, 146: "*YHWH* describes him as the One who in his grace remains forever faithful."

This is the personal and covenantal name through which God manifests himself to his people.

*YHWH Sabaoth* expresses the “royal name of God, full of majesty and glory” and “characterizes him as king in fullness of his glory who, surrounded by regimented hosts of angels, governs throughout the world as the Almighty, and in his temple receives the honor and acclamation of all his creatures.”<sup>235</sup> In the New Testament these names have been retained though in Greek forms. Bavinck highlights the addition to this list in the New Testament of Father, though he notes its theocratic role in Israel’s history in the Old Testament. Bavinck asserts, the name of Father as the “supreme revelation of God.” He argues for this because of the supreme importance and development of Father as a theological category in the New Testament.<sup>236</sup> This finds its fullest theological significance in the triune name “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” in which the fullness of the divine name *Elohim* has “unfolded and become most fully and splendidly manifest in the Trinitarian name.”<sup>237</sup>

Across Bavinck’s discussion of divine names then we have two themes to highlight. First, there is a diversity of names the one true God has disclosed himself through in the narrative of redemption yet they all have a singular reference in God; the display of God’s many divine names, and titles, rather than being a problem for divine simplicity facilitates our understanding of it. “God is so abundantly rich that we gain some idea of his richness only by the availability of many names.”<sup>238</sup> Secondly, the diversity of the divine names offers an answer to the absolute and personal theological problem for Bavinck. God has made

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<sup>235</sup> RD II, 146.

<sup>236</sup> RD II, 147. Bavinck ultimately cements this in the Trinity: “According to the New Testament, this relation has been made possible by Christ, who is the true, only-begotten, and beloved Son of the Father. And believers obtain adoption as children and become conscious of it by the agency of the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>237</sup> RD II, 147.

<sup>238</sup> RD II, 177.

himself known and is therefore a “personal” God, yet in his self-disclosure it is both his absolute transcendence and immanence that is highlighted.

*God’s Incommunicable Attributes* <sup>239</sup>

Bavinck’s section on the incommunicable attributes begins with a discussion of where the Trinity belongs in a discussion of the attributes, he argues in order for us to understand the doctrine of the Trinity we must begin with what the persons share in common, that being the divine nature.<sup>240</sup> His emphasis prior to jumping into the attributes is God’s self-existence and independence apart from his creatures, or God’s “absoluteness.” He inspects the incommunicable attributes in the following order: Independence, Immutability, Infinity (Eternity, Omnipresence), Unity, and Simplicity.

He argues God’s independence highlights his distinction from creation, what the Reformers refer to as aseity. Bavinck engages the concept of the absolute once again this time to assert, “Now when God ascribes this aseity to himself in scripture, he makes himself known as absolute being, as the one who *is* in an absolute sense. By this perfection he is at once essentially and absolutely distinct from his creation.”<sup>241</sup> Bavinck asserts, “God is exclusively from himself, not in the sense of being self-caused but from eternity to eternity who he is, being not becoming.”<sup>242</sup> Independence then is God’s complete distinction from his creation. Bavinck avoids the God of pantheism by making God independent from creation, and steers clear of deism in emphasizing God’s revelation to his people.

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<sup>239</sup> For each one of these attributes it must be stated, that the below discussion does not exhaust Bavinck’s conception of them, but is merely painting a clear enough picture to situate divine simplicity.

<sup>240</sup> RD II, 150. Bavinck gives one sentence credence to this being rooted in simplicity, but it is not the focal point of his argument. “He has a being (“nature,” “substance,” “essence”) of his own, not in distinction from his attributes, but coming to the fore and disclosing itself in all his perfections and attributes.” The committee’s translation is odd here, as it leaves out certain components of the Dutch, namely “kind”. GD II, 137: Dutch original – “Hij heeft een eigen wezen, een eigen φύσις, natura, substantia, essentia, niet in onderscheiding van zijn deugden, maar in alle deugden en volmaaktheden ons tegemoet tredende en kenbaar wordende.”

<sup>241</sup> RD II, 152. In the second two “absolutes” Bavinck uses the Dutch word volstrekten, which can also be translated: total, complete, entirely.

<sup>242</sup> RD II, 152.



Immutability naturally flows out of his understanding of aseity. Bavinck asserts that Christians built their doctrine of God's immutability on the scriptures. He additionally engages a multiplicity of philosophers who also have suggested God is immutable. By immutable Bavinck means that God remains eternally the same. Quoting Augustine, Bavinck rounds out his conception of immutability rooting it in God's "being": "His name is "being," and this name is an "unalterable name." All that changes ceases to be what it was. But true being belongs to him who does not change."<sup>243</sup>

In the second half of Bavinck's section on immutability, he engages those who are critical of immutability namely proponents of deism and pantheism. He offers two critiques of pantheism. The first critique Bavinck offers is the conflation of the creator and creature in pantheism where God is "becoming" rather than "being." This he asserts is the hinge on which the Creator and creature distinction rests. The second critique Bavinck levels, is related to the idea of "being" and "becoming" but is also related to the concept of the absolute. Bavinck indicates that pantheism hijacked the concept of the absolute that properly belongs to the idea of being. Bavinck states, "He cannot change for better or worse, for he is the absolute, the complete, the true being."<sup>244</sup> God is the absolute unchangeable being.

The next attribute of infinity spans 12 pages and is the largest attribute covered in Bavinck's incommunicable attributes, although it includes discussions on eternity and omnipresence. Divine infinity for Bavinck is:

...not an infinity of magnitude – in the sense in which people sometimes speak of the infinite or boundless dimensions of the spatial universe – for God is incorporeal and has no extension. Neither is it an infinity of number as in mathematics we speak

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<sup>243</sup> RD II, 154. Augustine, *The Trinity*, V, 2.

<sup>244</sup> RD II, 158.

of something as being infinitesimally small or infinitely large – for this would conflict with God’s oneness and simplicity. But it is an “infinity of essence.”<sup>245</sup>

In his discussion on eternity Bavinck is cognizant of the influence of deism and pantheism and carves out his conception critical of their constructions. Deism presents “eternity as time infinitely extended in both directions,” while pantheism suggests eternity is the “substance of time.” Alternatively, Bavinck defines eternity as not having a beginning, ending, or a succession of moments.<sup>246</sup> In relation to simplicity, Bavinck states that eternity “is identical with God’s being and hence with his fullness of being. Not only is God eternal; he is his own eternity.”<sup>247</sup>

In his construction of omnipresence, Bavinck once again makes a point to avoid the errors of pantheism and deism. For pantheism, the divine being is identified with the world. Deism attempts to avoid this by maintaining God’s distinction from the world at the cost of God no longer being immanent. Alternatively, Bavinck strives to maintain both God’s transcendence and his immanence. He first notes, that omnipresence as a concept only makes “sense” in relation to creation. In other words, to speak of God as everywhere there must be a where. Bavinck argues that God’s relation to space is “as the infinite One” in which, “existing within himself, God fills to repletion every point of space and sustains it by his immensity.”<sup>248</sup> In this manner, God is distinct from creation, but also present in his creation.

The second to last attribute is divine unity and it conveys for Bavinck God’s “absolute oneness and uniqueness, his exclusive numerical oneness” that there is “one divine

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<sup>245</sup> RD II, 160: “God is infinite in his characteristic essence, absolutely perfect, infinite in an intensive, qualitative, and positive sense.”

<sup>246</sup> RD II, 161-162.

<sup>247</sup> RD II, 163.

<sup>248</sup> RD II, 168.

being” who cannot be more than one being.<sup>249</sup> Bavinck does not address deism in this section, but he does critique pantheism. He argues:

When the confession of the one true God weakens and is denied, and the unity sought in pantheism eventually satisfies neither the intellect nor the heart, the unity of the world and of humankind, of religion, morality, and truth can no longer be maintained.<sup>250</sup>

In this manner, Bavinck sees the unity of God as holding together the unity of the created order, and that at the loss of its confession society will continue to existentially and structurally fragment. Bavinck’s eclectic method unfolds rather straightforwardly in his section on unity. He engages scriptural, patristic, modern, and philosophical sources to put forth his case for the abundant proof of the oneness of God. He catalogs the importance of the monotheism contrasting it with polytheism and pantheism, which both fail to offer true unity.

On the heels of his discussion of unity is divine simplicity. Bavinck’s placement of divine simplicity as the last incommunicable attributes is interesting. Rehnman notes that it was the practice of Reformed orthodoxy to place the attribute at the beginning of the discussion of attributes, similarly Aquinas begins his discussion of the divine attributes with simplicity.<sup>251</sup> First, this should be an indicator that Bavinck is performing his own theological task and that he is comfortable diverging from his sources for his purposes. Second, we should also note that Bavinck may have placed it last because he wanted to proceed from the diversity of the attributes to the unity of the attributes.

#### *God’s Communicable Attributes*

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<sup>249</sup> RD II, 170. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997), I, xiii, 19-20. Perhaps Bavinck finds precedence to split divine unity and divine simplicity from Calvin.

<sup>250</sup> RD II, 173.

<sup>251</sup> Rehnman, “The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy,” 374.

Bavinck's section on the communicable attributes is the second largest section of his doctrine of God, next to his section on the Trinity. The communicable attributes are categorized by the spiritual, intellectual, moral, and sovereign attributes. The previous section of incommunicable attributes closed discussing the *DDS*, this attribute is briefly picked up in the first section of his communicable attributes in his discussion of God as Spirit. Much like previous sections, Bavinck posits his descriptions in light of pantheism and deism, and continually engages the discussion of God's transcendence and immanence through the modern articulations of the issue in God as absolute or personal.

God is Spirit. This attribute asserts that God is incorporeal (without a body) and invisible. For Bavinck these naturally correspond with the truth of God's simplicity. Traditionally, the "spirituality" of God is subsumed under the simplicity and therefore as part of the incommunicable attributes. It is interesting therefore, how Bavinck attempts to bridge the gap between the incommunicable and communicable attributes through *DDS*. The section on spirituality closes with Bavinck reminding the reader that when scripture writes of the believer "seeing" God, it does so in the context of "divine condescension" in which God accommodates himself to his creatures and "makes himself known."<sup>252</sup> Bavinck argues that pantheism fails to do justice to God's "spiritual nature" in that it conflates the world and God.

Implied in the doctrine of God is spirit is the invisibility of God. Bavinck engages ancient and modern thinkers alike on the attribute, but ultimately asserts that scripture makes this doctrine abundantly clear. Much of his discussion revolves around the beatific vision, which he concludes arguing that humans will never have more than a finite vision of God, because God is an infinite object and we are finite and our consciousness will remain so, we

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<sup>252</sup> *RD* II, 190.

will never fully see God. Truly, every “vision of God... requires an act of divine condescension (*συγκαταβασις*), a revelation by which God on his part comes down to us and makes himself knowable.”<sup>253</sup>

The next three attributes are intellectual attributes; the first is that of knowledge, Bavinck states, “All of Scripture presupposes God’s consciousness and knowledge.”<sup>254</sup> God exhaustively knows and understands all things.<sup>255</sup> God’s knowledge of himself is necessary and comprehensive. Importantly, creation is not “necessarily” known, but God knows creation freely. Bavinck writes of God’s necessary knowledge of himself as his “self-consciousness” and his contingent knowledge of the world as his “world consciousness” although they are “organically connected” occurring in one in the same act of consciousness.<sup>256</sup>

Again here, Bavinck critiques pantheism. He writes, “Pantheism... denies to God both the knowledge of the world (“world-consciousness”), inner worldly self-consciousness, *and* knowledge of himself (“self-consciousness”)... Even where the Absolute comes to consciousness in individuals, it knows the world but not itself.”<sup>257</sup> In this manner, Bavinck sees scripture as putting forth a God whose knowledge is comprehensive, and knows all things from and through himself.<sup>258</sup>

The wisdom of God closely correlates with the attribute of knowledge, just viewed from a different angle for Bavinck. He hints at the importance of simplicity in God’s wisdom in that God’s wisdom is not many parts, but “one piece... gradually unfolding...

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<sup>253</sup> RD II, 190.

<sup>254</sup> RD II, 191.

<sup>255</sup> The doctrine of divine knowledge contains at least two important implications of DDS: First, God knows all through one single act; second, his free knowledge of the world does not depend on the world itself, but on God’s own eternal decree by which he wills the world to be as it is.

<sup>256</sup> RD II, 195.

<sup>257</sup> RD II, 193.

<sup>258</sup> At this point, Bavinck heads into a discussion on foreknowledge and middle knowledge, the focus of which is beyond the scope of this project.

over the centuries” on account of the multiplicity of his wisdom (Ephesians 3:10).<sup>259</sup>

Trustworthiness is the final intellectual attribute of God. God is trustworthy in three senses: metaphysically (God is truth), ethically (his word and deed correspond), and logically (correspondence between thought and reality).<sup>260</sup> However, these three senses are also one. Bavinck says, “This unity arises from the fact that truth in all three senses consists in correspondence between thought and being, between the ideal and the real.”<sup>261</sup>

He gives three ethical or moral attributes of God. The first is that God is his goodness. That God is absolutely good and the cause of all the good that is bestowed upon his creatures. This goodness manifests itself in diverse ways, in his covenantal love, mercy and grace, kindness, and even his judgment against sin. In this manner the second and third moral attributes, of holiness and righteousness are closely related.<sup>262</sup> Bavinck notes God’s holiness is not discussed by Aquinas as a distinct attribute.<sup>263</sup> Bavinck accentuates in this attribute both God’s internal holiness and his external holiness as it relates to his creation. The final moral attribute of God’s righteousness is his faithful and justly rule over all things. His own righteousness is evident in that punishes the wicked.

God’s sovereign attributes of will and omnipotence compose the last section of his communicable attributes. God necessarily wills to be who he is, and with respect to creation God freely wills to create and preserve all things. God is the creator, owner, possessor, preserver, and therefore Lord of all things.<sup>264</sup> Bavinck argues God wills creatures, not for their own sake, but for his.<sup>265</sup> In this section, Bavinck engages questions over the nature of

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<sup>259</sup> *RD II*, 201.

<sup>260</sup> *RD II*, 208-209.

<sup>261</sup> *RD II*, 209.

<sup>262</sup> *RD II*, 210-216

<sup>263</sup> *RD II*, 216.

<sup>264</sup> *RD II*, 228.

<sup>265</sup> *RD II*, 233. “He remains his own goal. He never focuses on his creatures as such, but through them he focuses on himself... His love for himself incorporates into itself the love that he has for his creatures and

God's will including the problem of evil. Bavinck's balanced discussion gives attention to both modern and ancient sources including Augustine, Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel, and Schelling.

The attributes, both communicable and incommunicable culminate in the attribute of perfection. "All the attributes of God discussed above are summed up in his perfection."<sup>266</sup> The two attributes that Bavinck highlights in his section on perfection are God's blessedness and glory. His blessedness is composed of three marks. First, because God is the absolute fullness of life and is independent from all creation he is absolutely blessed. Second, God not only *is* blessed, but also delights in his perfection. The third mark of blessedness is that God rest in his blessedness. God is his blessedness; "Blessedness and God are the same."<sup>267</sup> The final attribute is glory. Bavinck advises against talking of God as beautiful as the church fathers, scholastics, and Catholic theologians have. Beauty is properly attributed to creatures and we can only speak of beauty by way of analogy, on the other hand he asserts that Protestants speak in the language of scripture that of his glory.<sup>268</sup>

Across Bavinck's divine attributes, both incommunicable and communicable, it is worth noting two features that contribute to a reading of Bavinck as both modern and orthodox. First, Bavinck notes his engagement with the differing ecclesial traditions

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through them returns to himself. Therefore, his willing, also in relation to his creatures, is never a striving for some as yet unpossessed good... On the contrary: his willing is always – also in hand through his creatures – absolute self-enjoyment, perfect blessedness, divine rest. In God rest and labor are one; his self-sufficiency coincides with absolute actuality."

<sup>266</sup> RD II, 249-250. "Now, when we attribute supreme perfection to God, we thereby acknowledge that all the perfections we discover either positively or negatively in observing God's creatures belong absolutely and preeminently, that is, to the highest degree, to God. This implies, however, that they cannot all be attributed to him in the same sense. Some attributes belong to him characteristically, such as eternity, simplicity, and so on, which after all are not found in creatures. Others, such as intellect and will, belong to him preeminently, and because a faint reflection of these can also be discerned in creatures. Still others are ascribed to him only figuratively, such as physical sight and hearing, because these attributes are present in him in a divine way, not in a literal creaturely sense. But whatever difference this may make in the way in which we must ascribe this or that attribute to God, he nevertheless remains the sum of all conceivable perfections, the highest perfection in person, infinitely far removed from all defects and limitations."

<sup>267</sup> RD II, 251.

<sup>268</sup> RD II, 254.

throughout the discussion repeatedly asserting that the Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic church has affirmed these attributes at all times.<sup>269</sup> Second, Bavinck addresses modern theologians and confronts modern theological issues. In this manner, we can see his discussion as a reappropriation of classical orthodoxy in his own context addressing the theological issues of his day. This will become clearer in the next section, as we differentiate Bavinck from his sources through identifying points of continuity and discontinuity.

### III. Continuities and Discontinuities

This section of the paper will identify points of dissimilarity and similarity with Bavinck and his influences in his doctrine of God in particular, the *DDS*. Evaluating these points of discontinuity and continuity will spotlight for us that Bavinck cannot be strictly identified with his sources, but must be seen as doing his own unique theological project, even if the content of *Reformed Dogmatics* does not expand beyond the bounds of confessional thinking.

#### *Aquinas*

The structure and order of the divine attributes for Bavinck reflects a discontinuity with Aquinas. The *Summa* begins with simplicity (*simplicitas*) in question three. Aquinas then proceeds in question four to perfection (*perfectum*), questions 5-6 to goodness (*bonitas*), and questions 7-8 to infinity (*infinitum*) and beyond to the other attributes.<sup>270</sup> Rather than beginning with simplicity, as Aquinas does, Bavinck ends his discussion on the incommunicable attributes there. The differing starting places suggests that Bavinck may not have Aquinas directly in view.<sup>271</sup>

A further discontinuity that may be suggested is the categorization of the different attributes. It is clear that Bavinck and Aquinas grouped attributes differently. For

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<sup>269</sup> *RD* II, 151-152, 154-155, 163, 167, 185, 187, 243.

<sup>270</sup> *ST*, 1a, q3-10.

<sup>271</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 58. *RD* II, 254. Moreover, Bavinck specifically places himself in opposition to Aquinas in other places in his discussion of the attributes, namely the attribute of “glory.”



example, Aquinas understood simplicity, perfection, and goodness to be fundamental attributes. Alternatively, Bavinck situates his attributes under three headings of intellectual, ethical, and sovereign attributes with goodness as a moral attribute, and perfection as the attribute that sums up his attributes. Furthermore, while Bavinck enters into the discussion of the divine names through the *DDS*, he begins rather with God's independence or absoluteness. Moreover, Bavinck is asserting that simplicity, rather than being purely apophatic, is indeed a cataphatic doctrine. In other words, rather than it being considered strictly another doctrine of what God *is not*, it is also a positive description of the fullness of God's being.

We may suggest a point of continuity with Aquinas. Like Aquinas, Bavinck proceeds from the attributes of God or God's essence to the three persons. Nonetheless, it appears that Aquinas does so indeed to highlight the unity of God, while Bavinck takes up the discussion of attributes rather to reveal the manifold abundance of God's essence. On this understanding, we may suggest the continuity is only skin deep. It is fair to suggest that Bavinck in the domain of structure has more in common with the Reformed orthodoxy.

In terms of the actual construction of the *DDS* Bavinck and Aquinas have much in common, but there is still a point of discontinuity. They both utilize the same metaphysical categories. They both articulate that there are not "real" distinctions in God, but rather we understand the distinctions between the attributes through rational analysis (*ratio ratiocinata*). These distinctions we perceive as finite creatures grasping at the infinite and necessarily dividing and multiplying God into many parts. Nonetheless, "they signify him under diverse and multiple concepts, which are not synonyms."<sup>272</sup> To point out a discontinuity in actual construction Bavinck uses the phrase "absolute simplicity" which is absent from Aquinas,

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<sup>272</sup> *ST*, 1a, q.28, art. 3.

but present in constructions of Reformed orthodoxy.<sup>273</sup> We now turn to Reformed orthodoxy to consider the points of continuity and discontinuity.

*Reformed low, middle, and high Orthodoxy*

A point of continuity, noted above by Eglinton is that Bavinck begins his discussion on the divine attributes not with the attributes themselves, but with the divine names. Bavinck is not alone in this practice, for this is the general practice for Reformed scholastics.<sup>274</sup>

However, this does not imply that the reformed scholastics were uniform in their approach, or inspected the same divine names. Likewise, Bavinck's structure has continuity with the traditional structure of Reformed orthodoxy.<sup>275</sup>

A point of continuity and discontinuity are the opponents that Bavinck defends the *DDS* against has similarities with high Reformed Orthodoxy in the Netherlands namely the Remonstrants, Socinians, and scholasticism.<sup>276</sup> However, Bavinck also defends the doctrine against modern opponents. Furthermore, we may suggest that Bavinck's articulation of the diversity of the attributes in his *DDS* is equivalent to that of Reformed orthodoxy. Rehnman argues, "According to Reformed Orthodoxy then, the divine attributes differ from the

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<sup>273</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 54, 279. Muller indicates that Aquinas "does not use the phrase "absolute simplicity" – indeed *simplicitas absoluta* is not a term that one often encounters in traditional presentations of the doctrine of simplicity." Moreover, that "several of the orthodox writers do in fact use the term "absolute simplicity."

<sup>274</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 254. On the importance and role of the divine names for Reformed scholastics: "The orthodox writers evidence considerable diversity both of extent and of detail in their discussions of the divine names, but they virtually all indicate the importance of the topic to the theological system, because of the manner in which the discussion was capable of moving from exegesis to doctrinal formulation. ... This interest not only stands in continuity with the work of the second-generation of codifiers of the Reformation, it also stands in continuity with and builds upon the work of the Protestant exegetical tradition, in which the desire for strict verbal equivalency in translation and for identification of meaning through careful interpretation of Hebrew words has led to lengthy discussion of the various divine names." Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 217, 268. Zanchius can be one example as a foil for this, while he approached the attributes through the divine name he begins with *Jehovah* where as Bavinck began with *El, Elohim, El Shaddai*. Zanchius did eventually in his divine names section inspect *El, Elohim, El Shaddai*. Barrett, *Divine Simplicity*, 109. Barrett may be right when he argues that Bavinck begins with the divine names not necessarily to keep with the tradition, but because of his conviction that "all we can learn from God from his revelation is designated his Name in Scripture."

<sup>275</sup> Te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*, 111. Rehnman, "The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy," 357-361. Rehnman likewise notes a similar structure: 1) knowledge of God, 2) divine nature and divine attributes, 3) the persons of God.

<sup>276</sup> Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 135-138.

essence either by “the virtual distinction” or the “distinction of reason reasoned.”<sup>277</sup> Bavinck slots into the second group although both groups understand the attributes as distinct according to our creaturely knowledge.

Rehnman also observes five ways that Reformed orthodoxy typically describe what constitutes the *DDS*. 1) God is not composed of parts, 2) God is not composed of “genus and difference,” 3) God is not composed of substance and accidents, 4) God is pure act rather than composed of what he may become, and 5) “God is not composed of being, or existence, and essence; that is, *that* God is and *what* God is cannot be distinguished.”<sup>278</sup>

Bavinck’s accounts of *DDS* utilizes each of these categories. To suggest Bavinck’s uniqueness with respect to Reformed orthodoxy then is to make note of his use of Augustine and the “manifold abundance of God’s simplicity” and his engagement with modern theologians and his appropriation of a modified absolute. In other words, Bavinck finds the norm of simplicity not in scholasticism, but in Augustine and it is through Augustine that he appropriates a modified absolute.

A point of continuity and discontinuity is the grouping of the attributes. Although, not entirely monolithic the reformed scholastics did tend to group the attributes in similar categories. The category of intellectual attributes, Bavinck seems to have inherited from reformed scholasticism.<sup>279</sup> It is unclear the source of categorizing the moral/ethical attributes. The reformed scholastics grouped the same attributes, but this category went under different monikers. The ordering of the divine attributes is a point of discontinuity

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<sup>277</sup> Rehnman, “The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy,” 374. It is worth noting both of these ways of defining the attributes “virtual distinction” or “reason reasoned” are equivalent to Thomistic renderings of *DDS*.

<sup>278</sup> Rehnman, “The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy,” 374.

<sup>279</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 384-385.

between Bavinck and the Reformed scholastics, however this has as much to do with the diversity of Reformed scholasticism as the distinction of Bavinck himself.<sup>280</sup> Muller notes:

The doctrine of God taught by Reformed Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries presents a diverse and varied trajectory. Examination of the materials of the history demonstrates that, contrary to the typical perception of the secondary literature, the orthodox or scholastic theology of the era did not have a monolithic structure... Theologians within the Reformed orthodox camp also differed concerning the order and organization of the divine attributes – as they did concerning the nature and character of attribution itself.<sup>281</sup>

While there is no monolithic structure it is fair to suggest that Bavinck is distinct among them in his placement of simplicity as the last incommunicable attribute.<sup>282</sup> This is actually quite peculiar Rehnman comments in that typically divine simplicity “stands at the head of the nature and attributes.”<sup>283</sup> Nonetheless, it is also fair to conclude that *DDS* is still fundamental to Bavinck’s doctrine of God.

To draw this section, Bavinck’s simplicity should be considered as distinct from his sources. He pulls from an eclectic group of theologians and philosophers. His structure and articulation of simplicity while resonating primarily with Reformed orthodoxy has clear continuity with Aquinas. However, Bavinck’s modified appropriation of absolute and his engagement with modern thinkers affirms Bavinck’s Reformed catholicity and the organic motif.

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<sup>280</sup> Te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy*, 129. Te Velde has noted that typically the largest discussion in the doctrine of God is the divine attributes, in Bavinck’s case this is also true, the divine attributes compose the largest portion of his doctrine of God.

<sup>281</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 32.

<sup>282</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation*, 273-284. There is a notable expansion from Melancthon, Calvin, Luther and Zwingli to the Reformed scholastics that give *DDS* more attention. It is also not a distinct attribute in a number of Reformed scholastics systems (Maccovius, Gomarus, Binning, Charnock, Ridgley, and Gil). Alternatively, it is a primary attribute for Amandus Polanus, Jacob Alting, Johann Heinrich Hottinger, Edward Leigh, Johannes Cocceius, Francis Turretin, and Petrus van Mastricht. Muller does indicate that Franz Burman and Benedict Pictet place it towards the end of their divine attributes.

<sup>283</sup> Rehnman, “The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy,” 374.

## CHAPTER VI:

### CONCLUSION

The central aim of the thesis was to test James Eglinton's "organic" hypothesis by applying it to Herman Bavinck's *DDS*. The thrust of the first chapter consisted of introducing the reader to Bavinck as eclectically orthodox and modern. Prior to Eglinton's reading Bavinck scholarship had characterized him as either modern *or* orthodox, rather than the one Bavinck. It was argued in contrast to this earlier scholarship that Bavinck's method could be characterized as a rhapsody, in the musical sense of the word, in which the composer consciously pulls from contrasting styles and tones to make a unified piece. In this manner, Bavinck intentionally engaged modern and orthodox theologians alike to compose his doctrine of God in a confessionally reformed manner that is modern nonetheless.

In the second chapter, we displayed the foundation for Bavinck's organic motif in *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* through the scholarship of Eglinton. This organic motif was advanced in scholarship revolving around Bavinck's reformed catholicity and principled engagement with modern theologians and philosophers. The paper then discussed the manner in which Bavinck's reformed catholicity functions at the center of his theological program, thanks to the scholarship of Cory Brock and Nathaniel Sutanto. The chapter closed discussing the place of theology among the sciences. This was crucial to Bavinck's reformed catholicity as it helpfully identified the unifying 'organic' role Bavinck perceives theology playing among the other sciences, and the principled manner in which he can then engage truth, wherever it is found.

In the third chapter, we began to differentiate Bavinck from Aquinas, in particular through his theological method identifying points of discontinuity and continuity. It was shown that one cannot simply suggest that Bavinck is 'Thomistic' but any reading of Bavinck

requires reading him on his own terms instead of simply identifying him with his sources. This chapter supported the reading of Eglinton's organic motif in that we see that one cannot simply identify Bavinck with his sources. We were also able to see the theological fruitfulness of Bavinck's method, as he tends first faithfully to the text, then to the confession of our ancestors in the faith, and then to work of the Spirit in common grace. Therefore, Bavinck's method bridged the classical and the contemporary and prepared him for principled theological rapprochement.

In the fourth chapter, we turned directly to an exposition of Bavinck's *DDS* and the unfolding of his "Bavinckian rhapsody" in his *DDS*. Here Bavinck's organic Reformed catholicity was confirmed through his critical appropriation of the ecclesial tradition and engagement with ancient and modern thinkers alike. Bavinck's modest uniqueness was also noted in his articulation of simplicity and his modified appropriation of the absolute. Moreover, we noted the interesting role that simplicity seems to play for Bavinck, in that rather than being opposed to diversity, it is precisely the doctrine that facilitates it. This can be seen as supporting the "organic motif" in that: "The foundation of both diversity and unity is *in God* . . . here is a unity that does not destroy but rather maintains diversity, and a diversity that does not come at the expense of unity, but rather unfolds it in its riches."<sup>284</sup>

We recognized then that *DDS* plays a key conceptual role in how we understand the organic motif. For Bavinck, God is simple, yet this simplicity is not one that diminishes God's diversity "The glory of the confession of the Trinity consists above all in the fact that that unity, however absolute, does not exclude but includes diversity . . . whose diversity, so far from diminishing the unity, unfolds it to its fullest existence."<sup>285</sup> In Bavinck's description of *DDS* he defends it from the charge of metaphysical abstraction as well as consistent with

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<sup>284</sup> *RD* II, 437.

<sup>285</sup> *RD* II, 300.

the doctrine of the Trinity. He affirms that we may distinguish the attributes rationally, but that these distinctions are not “real” distinctions in God.

In the fifth chapter, we situated Bavinck’s *DDS* in the structure of his doctrine of God. We noted that the doctrine appears in both his divine names and incommunicable attributes. In both sections, Bavinck emphasizes the manifold abundance of God’s essence suggests *DDS* as facilitating divine unity-in-diversity. In the divine names, simplicity facilitates the role of God’s self-determination as a being who reveals himself as the *one* God with *many* names. In the incommunicable attributes divine simplicity is the final attribute and it allows him to transition to the communicable attributes. Following this, we revealed that there are notable continuities and discontinuities between Bavinck and his sources in regards to structure and content from the previous chapter.

Both of the previous two chapters then supported the organic motif of Eglinton. The archetypal/ectypal triform organic motif relies on simultaneous consideration of both unity and diversity. Thus God’s simplicity for Bavinck is possibly the foundational archetype of the ectypal cosmic unity-in-diversity, for simplicity does not diminish God’s diversity, but rather this manifold simplicity facilitates the unbounded ocean of God’s diversity and exalts our worship of God.

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